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Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil

Berel Lang

The Republican Party and the Jews

Herbert L. Solomon

A Yankee's View of Liverpool Jewry

Gabriel A. Sivan

The Talmud — A Source for Yiddish

Theodore Friedman

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JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Analysing Hannah Arendt

The German-Jewish political philosopher, Hannah Arendt, was, undoubtedly, one of the most distinguished intellectuals in America during the post-Holocaust era. She is probably best known as the author of the phrase, "banality of evil," which she coined to describe her understanding of the nature of Nazism. Her view of this most monstrous of evils, in particular, and of the nature of radical evil, in general, has won wide currency, though it is equally widely misunderstood.

In his paper, "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil," *Berel Lang* analyses both the apparent contradictions in her views as well as the challenges against them mounted by her critics. He finds that, in her life and thought, Arendt epitomizes the dichotomy that characterized German Jews and, indeed, all modern Jews in the Emancipation era.

How Will Jews Vote in 1988?

In 1972, we published a symposium on the theme, "Jews and Liberalism — Marriage, Separation or Divorce." That was a presidential election year when, as usual, interest rose about the on-going question: the striking attachment of Jews to the liberal cause in domestic and foreign affairs. This unique phenomenon in American politics can be explained on two principal grounds. Some have described it as a consequence of the humane ethical tradition which Jews have inherited in their religion; others have seen it as the reaction of an insecure group, fearful of the attacks of reactionary forces.

In 1978, when Ronald Reagan was riding the crest of his extraordinary popularity and Jews had made gigantic progress, integrating themselves into every aspect of American society, many prognosticators anticipated a substantial swing by Jewish voters to the Republican column. Will it take place now? Clearly, any theory that offers one broad explanation for the attachment of Jews to the Democratic party is, ipso facto, unconvincing. In his paper, "The Republican Party and the Jews," *Herbert L. Solomon* offers a thoughtful and detailed analysis of the complex factors in the strong bond between Jews and the Democratic party and then seeks to weigh the significance of new factors that would seem to portend change. Like other observers, he feels that a new political era is dawning for American Jews. In November, 1988, the answer will be clear.

The Akedah Re-Interpreted

There is probably no single episode in the Bible that has evoked a more extensive and varied body of interpretation than the moving account of *Akedat Yitzhak*, "the Binding of Isaac." Scripture itself describes the episode as "the testing of Abraham," — a change in designation which is itself significant, though it has not hitherto been noted.

The traditional interpretations, in all their variety and extent, may be studied in the magisterial work of Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (volumes 1 and 5) and several other books. During the years, this journal has played host to many newer interpretations of this moving biblical episode, the poignancy of which has been deepened in our age.

In his essay, "Toward a Re-Humanization of the *Akedah* and Other Sacrifices," *Moshe Moskowitz* approaches the subject from a novel perspective, arguing that neither God nor Isaac nor Abraham is the true hero!

Our Debt to Kaplan

In recent years, the Haskalah, the movement for Jewish Enlightenment, which flourished from the late eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth, has had a bad press. Whether this is an instance of the "Monday-morning quarterback" phenomenon or the "biting-the-hand-that-feeds-you" syndrome is hard to tell; perhaps it is an instance of both. The weaknesses of the movement have been mercilessly attacked and its major achievements belittled, denied or ignored by many today who are its beneficiaries, and whose ranks include virtually all modern Jews.

A similar fate has overtaken Mordecai M. Kaplan, the great twentieth century Jewish religious thinker, who embodied the spirit of the Haskalah and carried it further into our day. Virtually all thoughtful Jews who are aware of the challenge of modernity should recognize the debt that they owe to him. In his paper, "Mordecai M. Kaplan and the Retrieval of the *Haskalah*," *Emanuel S. Goldsmith* performs an act of historic justice to both of the elements in the title.

Hawthorne and the Jews

Readers of JUDAISM are well aware that the areas of concern of this journal are Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics, broadly construed. Only in exceptional cases does material appear in our columns that is outside of these parameters. One such instance, which we believe will be welcomed by our readers, is "A Yankee's View of Liverpool Jewry," which purports to be a selection from the writings of the famous American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who served as American consul in Liverpool, England, 1853-1856. One of the results of this sojourn was the *English Notebooks*. The research (and the imagination) of an Israeli scholar and writer, *Gabriel A. Sivan*, have "discovered" several hitherto unknown pages from Hawthorne's book. Their "authenticity" is vouched for by the

accuracy of the historical references and the characteristic style of the New England writer.

Another View of God

In "God as Promise of Existence," *Meir Ben-Horin* boldly undertakes to grapple with the most fundamental issue in religion, if not in life itself — the nature of God. Following in the footsteps of countless men and women who have seen or experienced the agony of suffering, he denies the truth of any concept of God which posits God's existential reality in a world where evil holds sway. He might have cited Augustine who declared: "If God can destroy evil and does not, He is not good. If He cannot, He is not powerful."

Obviously, the First Reader is not an adequate forum for theological discussion. But since the author does me the honor of citing the chapter, "A Cruel God or None: The Challenge of the Holocaust" in my recently published book, *Judaic Ethics For a Lawless World*, and I cannot write a "Letter to the Editor!" I should like to comment briefly on his critique.

He cites my five principles and finds them unacceptable. Actually, they need to be fleshed out if justice is to be done to them; as Ernst Renan said, "Truth resides in the nuances." The reader who wishes to understand my views will need to read the entire chapter itself (which sounds suspiciously like a commercial!).

Also, I am not offering the survivors of Treblinka and Maidanek "consolation." Any "consolation" for the Holocaust is blasphemy. I seek to find a way for the post-Treblinka and Maidanek generation, which means all of us, to face the future with courage free from bravado and with hope sans illusion.

Meir Ben-Horin proposes to see God as a symbol of "promise" for the future rather than a God possessing existential reality and personhood, however these concepts are interpreted. His view has obvious affinities with those of Samuel Alexander, C.E. Joad and Mordecai Kaplan. But whether God merely as "promise" will have the power to imbue men and women with courage and faith in the face of evil remains to be demonstrated. At all events, this essay deserves earnest and prayerful attention from our readers.

A Survivor's Apologia

Four decades after the overthrow of Hitler and the Nazi regime, the Holocaust continues to cast a dark shadow across the lives of its survivors, as well as of all other Jews. Its influence upon the faith of those who miraculously escaped death at their hands is as varied as the individuals themselves.

A deeply moving response to the Holocaust, highly individual in character, is presented by *Steven L. Jacobs*, in his paper, "(If) There is No 'Commander'? There Are No 'Commandments'!" Himself a child-

survivor of the Holocaust, he found it impossible to believe in a good and just God, as did many other survivors, to be sure.

However, there is one troubling implication implied in the title of his article: Without a faith in the living God, the basis for the *mizvot* and Jewish living has been undercut. The author does not flinch from this conclusion. He decided, therefore, to become a Reform rabbi and has adopted an eclectic approach to Jewish ritual. From the vast treasure-house of Jewish practices and observances, he feels free to select those which he finds worthwhile preserving.

The Constitution Is Well-Founded

When the authors of the Constitution set forth their views on how the United States should be governed, they drew on their backgrounds of both Biblical and natural law. These influences, subconscious though they may have been, are noted by *Bernard M. Zlotowitz* in his paper, "The Biblical and Rabbinic Underpinnings of the Constitution." Perhaps it is this solid grounding that has made the Constitution the lasting document that it is.

The Talmud and Yiddish

In his paper, "The Talmud — A Source for Yiddish," *Theodore Friedman* offers some striking evidence of the degree to which talmudic study became part and parcel of the every-day life of the Jew in Eastern Europe. He calls attention to countless phrases, used in Yiddish, which are translations or modifications of talmudic passages, and which became engrained in the daily speech of all classes in the community, including those who themselves had never studied the talmudic texts.

The Ever-Present Thread in the Torah

In "The Garden of Eden: From Re-Creation to Reconciliation," *Bernard Och* concludes his analysis of the covenant theme in the Torah. As indicated in his first paper, which appeared in the Spring issue, the theme begins with creation and continues unbroken until it reaches its climax in the revelation at Sinai.

Are They All Enemies?

In this day of heightened tensions and mounting hostility one often hears the view expressed that anti-Semitism is ineradicable, if not congenital to the Christian world.

In his paper, "Enemies or Jew-Haters? Reflections on The History of Anti-Semitism," *Samuel Schafner* opposes this widespread feeling, not merely because of the bleak prospect that it holds out for the future, but because it is basically untrue. He urges a clear distinction between myth-making and the study of history. When properly evaluated, the grandeur and the tragedy of Jewish history offer grounds for hope that this most pernicious of group maladies can ultimately be brought under control.

Confession in the Plural

In the realm of ideas, style is often as important as substance; in fact, the substance may be molded by the style. In his essay, "Jewish Confession as 'Normal Mysticism'," *Robert J. Milch* discusses a characteristically Jewish mode of confessing sin — the use of the plural rather than the singular, as in *ashamnu*, "We are guilty" and *al het*, "For the sins which we have committed before You." While other interpretations of this Jewish practice are not excluded, the author sets forth an interesting explanation eminently worthy of consideration.

Zion or Canaan?

The plethora of problems confronting Israel in its internal affairs — political, economic and religious —, in its foreign policy and in its relationship to Diaspora Jewry, cannot be understood — let alone solved — without a basic philosophy of Zionism and Judaism.

Two brilliant and consistent views of the role of Israel in the Jewish world were articulated by the distinguished Jewish scholar, Simon Rawidowicz and the gifted poet, Yonatan Ratosh. Their well thought-out positions, diametrically opposed to one another, serve as a measuring rod for all other viewpoints that fall between them and are being articulated today.

The views of both men, as they appear in two recently published volumes dealing with their thought, are discussed by *Gordon Tucker* in a review-essay, "Israel, Canaan and the Diaspora."

R.G.

We have suffered a loss in the passing of our colleague on the Board of Contributing Editors of JUDAISM,

Meir Ben-Horin, ז"ל

In addition to his distinguished career as a Jewish educator, he has enriched us through his writings in the fields of Zionist theory and contemporary Jewish religious thought.

יהי זכרו ברוך

Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil

BEREL LANG

IN THE 20TH CENTURY THE POSITION OF the German Jewish community was to be one of unusual complexity, of powerful ironies and, ultimately, of great disruption and pain. On the one hand, the ideals nourished by the Enlightenment, emerging in the last part of the 18th Century, and represented in Germany by such figures as Kant, Lessing, and Goethe, had spoken eloquently about the dignity of man, about the principles of civic equality and the inalienable rights shared by all persons. The hopeful statements of these ideals, and the political changes which accompanied them, produced a strong sense of identification on the part of German Jews in the life of their country. By the beginning of the 20th Century, and still more obviously by the time of the first World War, German Jews had a tradition of actively contributing to German culture — in literature and the arts, in the natural and social sciences, in politics. If one extends this brief survey to German as a language and not only to Germany as a political entity, the achievements loom even larger — since we would make room, then, as the present century unfolded, also for the Vienna of Freud and the Prague of Franz Kafka.

And yet, of course, notwithstanding the principles announced by the Enlightenment, despite the achievements of the German-Jewish community and the will of many of its members to identify themselves as Germans, the nation and the culture resisted their integration, first in small ways, and then much more purposefully. Why this process went in the direction it did is not the focus of the discussion here, except for the fact that *its* background is also responsible for the extraordinary ambivalence — cultural, religious, ideological, psychological — which came to affect the 20th century German Jewish community — and then, too, the thought of Hannah Arendt, which is to be considered here. Moses Mendelssohn, the most prominent Jewish spokesman for the German Enlightenment, answered the question of how the Jews of Germany could live up to ideals of emancipation and yet remain Jews, by endorsing the recommendation that they should attempt to be Jews in their homes and Germans in the street. But this was more easily said than done — as we recall now in the common parody of the statement which asserted that

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the Jews turned out to be Germans in their homes and Jews only in the street (that is, in the eyes of the Germans). This parody is something of an exaggeration, no doubt, but there was enough truth in it to attest to the continuing ambiguity between the public and the private lives of the Jews of Germany. To be sure, the strains between the public and the private, between civic life and private conscience, have been problems in the 20th century not only for Judaism but for other religions as well — (and among Jews elsewhere, too, not only for those in Germany). But in an age when religious identity of every kind would be challenged, there was, for the Jew, the additional problem of discovering what public role he would be *allowed* even if he were willing to give up his private or religious commitments. The question of the relation between personal conscience or religious commitment, on the one hand, and a public or civic life, on the other, was, we shall see, a constant preoccupation of Hannah Arendt; it was also a factor in her conception of modern totalitarianism which was the basis for her view of what is referred to here as the “politics of evil.”

There is perhaps no more pointed example of the conflicting alternatives between a public and a private self as they appeared to 20th century German Jewry than in the family history of one of its most intriguing and best-known offspring, Gershom Scholem, who, in his writings about Jewish mysticism, would substantially alter the understanding of Jewish religious history. Like in the story recited in the Passover Hagaddah, there were in the Scholem household, located in middle-class Berlin at the turn of the century, four sons. Of these, Gershom was the youngest. Early in his life and almost entirely on his own initiative, Gershom identified himself with the Jewish tradition, undertook to study Hebrew and the classical texts, and became a Zionist. For such non-conformity, his father, when Gershom was about 20, forced him to leave the family home and cut off relations with him (these relations were later, but only shakily, restored). Gershom emigrated to Palestine in 1923, took a position in the National Library and then in the newly-founded Hebrew University — and the rest of his story is known. Gershom's eldest brother had before this joined the family printing business and, in the process of becoming a man of affairs, had also become an ardent German patriot. After the Nazis took power, in 1938, he emigrated to Australia — but he would, thirty years later and even after everything that had occurred in the intervening years, *still* describe himself as a German nationalist. The next-to-eldest brother more or less accepted the values of the Scholem parents themselves: conservative politically and liberal with respect to Judaism, stopping just short of full assimilation. The third brother, Werner, who was closest in age to Gershom, chose to join the Communist Party and was eventually elected to the Reichstag as a deputy of the Party. In his arguments with Gershom the Zionist, it was Werner's view that the so-called Jewish Question was, in fact, a human question — that the status of the Jews in Germany (indeed, of Jews any place in the world) was an issue

not of maintaining Jewish identity, but of achieving universal social justice. This brother was killed by the Nazis in Buchenwald in 1940. Four brothers — four very different conceptions of Jewish identity and four different destinies — in the face of what had been, after all, a single and common starting point.

I would add to this brief family survey a reference to two other items that Gershom Scholem himself notes in his autobiography. The first of these is an incident that he relates. At the age of fourteen, he received the gift of a photograph of Theodore Herzl from his non- or (in the case of his father) anti-Zionist parents. There was for him, first, the oddity of this gift as it came to him from them — it was his parents' Christmas gift to him. The second item is his report that, to the best of his knowledge, despite his father's emphasis on the identity of German Jews as Germans and despite his father's standing in the business community which brought him many acquaintances in the sociable city of Berlin — never once had a non-Jew entered the family home. So much, one might say, for the hope that the Jews might appear to the *Germans* as Germans.

Hannah Arendt's family history, which began in Kant's city of Königsberg, was not as dramatic or as symptomatic as Scholem's — although, since the names of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem have now been mentioned together, this brief parenthesis of social history should also be completed after a sharp exchange of letters between them following the publication of Arendt's book on the Eichmann trial. Scholem, who had been a friend of Arendt's, never spoke to her again.

I mention these anecdotes instead of moving directly to discuss the "politics of evil" both for themselves and also for a purpose — and this is to suggest that Arendt's reflections on the modern history of evil involve much the same ambivalence (verging at times on inconsistency) that we find in the details of her history and in many of her writings but, especially, those that have Judaism and Zionism as their subjects. Arendt is, it seems to me, basically an ironical writer, continually asserting that what seems to be the case often turns out to be exactly its opposite, that even what appears to be the most monstrous evil may, in fact, be something else. As for many passionate ironists, this tendency often leaves both her and her readers, when we ask about her basic commitments, in a quandary. It is not unusual that we should find the life or biography of a philosopher embodied in his or her thinking — and, in many ways, Arendt seems, in her writing as well as in her life, to personify the history — in a sense, also the end — of German Jewry. She would never, *did never*, question or doubt her identification as a Jew.¹ But how to translate that

1. We might recall here the statement by Rahel Varnhagen soon before her death, which Arendt quotes with great deliberation and emphasis at the beginning of her biography of Varnhagen: "The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life — having been born a Jewess — this I should on no account

identification into an *identity* was constantly weighted for her with ambiguities; these do not resolve themselves even now when we are in a position to reflect on her life and thought as a whole.

This same tendency to ambiguity and irony plays a central role in Arendt's discussion of what she claims to be the new form which evil assumes in the 20th century, in the new explanations we find there of how evil comes to exist and of how it does its work. To be sure, in one form or other these issues have a long history in religion and philosophy as well as in everyday life — but we can, I believe, discover in Arendt's thinking a coherent and valuable response to such questions. The trail begins here about mid-point in her writings and then extends backward and forward to other of her books. The mid-point I refer to is her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann — *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt's analysis of the Eichmann trial has usually been read and interpreted — and — criticized — as if it were quite independent of her other writings; but it is only by relating this book to those other writings that we can understand her position on the nature — and sometime “banality” — of evil. This does not mean that Arendt's conclusions on this issue are adequate or even that they are consistent — and critics have attacked her on both those counts. But even allowing for such criticism, her account sheds an unusual and valuable light on totalitarianism, a form of political organization which was, in her view, a unique phenomenon, an invention of the 20th century and, finally, also, a new development in the history of evil. Even the term which she uses to designate that evil — its “banality” — has newly entered the language.

Arendt's report of the trial of Eichmann, a report which appeared in 1963, originally as a series of articles in the *New Yorker* and then, soon afterward, as a volume became a center of controversy as soon as it was published, although it should also be recalled that the strongest reactions to the book were *not* directed at its provocative title. The main protests took issue with a less prominent theme — her discussion of the role, during the Holocaust, of the Jewish communal structures, in particular the Jewish councils or *Judenräte*. It was Arendt's contention that the Nazis were abetted in their design by these Jewish communal organizations — in part by specific decisions which the Councils and their leaders made, in part by the very *existence* of the Councils. By their decisions in response to Nazi dictates — Arendt claimed — the councils, in effect, collaborated with the Nazis; by their very existence, they encouraged passivity and the illusion of hope at a time when what should have been encouraged was precisely the opposite of these.

Arendt was not the first writer to make these charges, but she was undoubtedly the most influential one to have done so, and her accusation

now wish to have missed.” In *Rahel Varnhagen*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 3.

gained in emphasis by its appearance in connection with the trial of a man whose inculpation in the events of the Holocaust was undeniable. The reaction to Arendt's rather brief comments on this topic was proportionately harsh; and it seems clear now, in light of the evidence, that, in the charges she made, Arendt was guilty at least of oversimplification — for example, that what she characterized as the universal reaction of the Jewish communities to the Nazi threat was, in fact, far from uniform. But the inadequacy of her account on this point is less relevant for the moment than the fact that her position here was part of a more general view that she held of the “politics of evil” — a view which attempted to describe what happened to the individual and his moral character — and to communities — under the weight of totalitarianism. In order to see *this* development, however, we have to turn to the more central theme of Arendt's book on the Eichmann trial — that is, to her conception of the “banality of evil” as she applied that phrase to Eichmann and, by implication, to many others.

About this theme of her book, too, the reaction to Arendt's formulation was severe — and here, also, it seems she invited this reaction. To describe the role of a central figure in the Holocaust as banal seems unavoidably to diminish both the enormity of what occurred in the Holocaust itself and the culpability of those responsible for it. Arendt did not, as she herself pointed out, agree with these implications — but she was obviously willing to risk them, and the reason for this was the unusual conception of evil that she located in the person and actions of Eichmann.

One thing which the trial in Jerusalem had made quite clear, in Arendt's opinion, was what Eichmann was *not*. If we ordinarily mean by evil the acts of a person who, like Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*, moves at every turn to cause suffering and then, having succeeded, takes pleasure in that result, someone who commits himself to evil as a principle — this was not the Eichmann who was revealed at his trial, even on the strongest arguments of the prosecution. The charge that evil had been chosen knowingly, chosen for the sake of evil itself, simply did not match up with the acts of the man in the glass booth in Jerusalem, even after taking into account all of the evidence against him. Here was a man who repeatedly insisted that the scenes which he observed in his trips to the camps of the East were repugnant to him; who claimed — evidently with the expectation of being believed — that, notwithstanding the terrible history of which he had been part, he, “personally,” had nothing against Jews. Here was a man who would cite Kant's Categorical Imperative to justify his own obedience to the order given for the Final Solution: If he had disobeyed those orders, so Eichmann's version of Kant went, every soldier would be justified in disobeying whatever orders he happened to object to.

There are undoubtedly various ways of understanding a person who had done what Eichmann had done (and what he freely admitted to having done) in organizing the deportation of hundreds of thousands of

Jews but who would, on the other hand, express the views just mentioned. Arendt's conception of the banality of evil is one such judgment, although here, too, it is important to understand what she means by the phrase and what she does not mean by it. The term "banality" sometimes refers to what is common or commonplace — and readers who interpret the phrase in this way take it to mean that Eichmann had acted "commonly" — that is, not much differently from the way other people would have acted had they been in his place. This interpretation brings Arendt dangerously close to asserting that Eichmann's failings, even if we judge them as crimes, were, after all, only human — that there is, perhaps, a similar potential for evil in every human being and, thus, finally, that there was nothing unusual about Eichmann himself. And *this* conclusion, if it does not absolve Eichmann, certainly diminishes the weight of the charges against him.

But there is an alternate reading of "banality" which, it seems to me, comes closer to Arendt's intention — and which also underlies her conception of the politics of evil. If calling evil "banal" means that a person acts as he does because although as a human being he *might* have thought clearly about what he was doing but did not; that he only echoed disconnected ideas or ideals which he had taken over from others without understanding them; that he did not think enough about what he was doing to recognize what its consequences would be, or that the so-called principles on which he was choosing to act were self-contradictory; if, in other words, the evil-doer was a "hollow man," emptied of whatever it is that distinguishes human beings as human — *then* the result of this would be the banality, the sheer mechanical thoughtlessness, of the evil-doer.

This, it seems to me, is, indeed, Arendt's judgment of Eichmann who could not, or at least would not, think about what he was doing. He was not, in these terms, irrational or mad — it was, rather, a matter of being non-rational, of looking human but not quite *being* human. The surest evidence of this for Arendt was the fact that Eichmann seemed unable to recognize a connection between himself and other human beings;² he could not put himself in the place of others, that act of moral imagination which is a condition for moral judgment of any kind. How else, Arendt argues, could someone see no inconsistency between sending hundreds of thousands of people to their deaths and continuing to believe that he had nothing "personal" against them? Arendt finds this banality epitomized — it is at this point in her book that she first introduces the phrase the "banality of evil" — in Eichmann's last words, uttered only a short time before he was to be hanged. Even at that hour, she emphasizes, he remained the captive of words he had heard but had not thought. In his speech, he praises Germany, the country he had served; Austria, his na-

2. See *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 48.

tive land; and Argentina, the country which provided him with a refuge after the war, until he was seized there by the Israeli agents. He would, he says, with a lack of self-consciousness that verges on unconsciousness — “never forget them.”

It seems to me that this is about as far as we can go in understanding what Arendt intended by her phrase, the “banality of evil” — although, again, saying this does not mean that no objections can be raised against the view itself. When Arendt asserts that Eichmann was “thoughtless,” a “caricature,” a “clown” (it is also to these characteristics that she attributes the “banality”) — it seems unlikely that anyone reflecting on the Holocaust would ordinarily associate those terms with the world that Eichmann had inhabited. In speaking in this way of Eichmann, Arendt ignores certain important distinctions — and she also, at a deeper level, places unusual weight on the power of thinking or reason itself — as if the capacity to think would suffice, by itself, to prevent the occurrence of evil. Was it only because Eichmann did not know how to think that he did what he did? How much of evil-doing even outside the Holocaust would that explain?

These last questions bring us closer to the “politics of evil” and, indeed, to the problem of evil more generally. Arendt’s critics objected to her conception of the “banality of evil” because it seemed to diminish Eichmann’s responsibility — and the same objection would apply to a view of evil as the product of thoughtlessness. In everyday life, if someone does not intend to do something, if a person acts accidentally or when he intends to do something else, if he acts without thinking — then we would ordinarily agree that his responsibility for what he does is diminished. At an extreme, for people who are insane or for young children, we excuse them for all responsibility whatever. The history of ethical thinking as a whole is, in fact, sharply divided between two contradictory views of the relation between knowledge and moral responsibility. On one side in this dispute we find a so-called “rationalist” view of ethics, according to which reason and knowledge are all-powerful. For ethical thinkers in this tradition — for example, Plato — no one never does evil knowingly or intentionally, no one ever *wants* to do wrong. If people knew that what they were doing was evil, this knowledge, by itself, would compel them to avoid it. Thus, when someone does wrong, he does it because he believes that what he is doing is good, not evil. He may be mistaken about that, of course, but then, too, he acts out of ignorance. And if someone acts out of ignorance, his responsibility is considerably diminished; at most, he is responsible for not knowing something he should have known, and this responsibility does not apply in every case.

This may seem a very mild explanation of the phenomenon of evil — as can be seen from the contrasting view which is vividly represented in the western religious traditions, in a radical form in Christianity and, somewhat more moderately, in Judaism. Here the claim is made that it

is, indeed, possible to know something to be wrong and to do it anyway (this, it has been argued, is precisely the capacity which Adam and Eve acquired by their first disobedience). Knowledge by itself, on these accounts, does not avert evil-doing, since the *will* to do evil is also a factor. Thus, ignorance may *sometimes* explain why wrongs are done, but not always — and when we find that someone who does wrong knew what he was doing — or if he didn't know, that he *should* have known — he is, to that extent, responsible both for what he did and for its consequences.

It seems clear that Arendt's view of Eichmann and the banality of evil is committed to the first of these two alternatives: Eichmann, in her judgment, simply did not think, perhaps he did not even have the capacity to think, about what he was doing — and the implications of her stress on this is that if he *had* thought about it he would have acted differently, or at least that whatever evil he did would not have been banal. Even holding this, however, believing that in some sense Eichmann did not know what he was doing, Arendt holds that Eichmann should have been punished as he was, concluding finally that there was no alternative.

Now it might be objected that there is an inconsistency here — that Arendt's explanation of why Eichmann did what he did contradicts the judgment that she passes on him. It is not clear to me how Arendt would have responded to this criticism; but of more basic importance in any event, it seems to me, is the fact that Arendt's ambiguous judgment of Eichmann is, itself, part of a larger view of the politics of evil that Arendt had begun to develop long before the Eichmann trial. Seen against *that* background, in fact, Eichmann appears as an example of a new *kind* of evil-doer, one which comes into existence with 20th century totalitarianism. For with that development, Arendt claims, we discover a new stage in the moral history of mankind: something changes in the character of evil, for its agents and even for its victims. Thus, her writings that describe this change also become pertinent to the attempt to understand, or, at least, represent, Eichmann.

In 1951, Arendt published what for many of her readers remains her most important book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. It was her most sustained response to the phenomenon of Nazism which had been brought to an abrupt end only a few years before, and which before that had radically disrupted Arendt's own life. In 1933, she left Germany for France; she was able to find work there mainly on behalf of various Jewish organizations, but after the Nazi invasion of France she was briefly in an internment camp. At the beginning of 1941, she came to the United States where she would live for the rest of her life, and where she soon began work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Characteristically, her analysis of Nazism attempted to place that phenomenon in the context of a broader historical background, first by relating it to the history of anti-Semitism, and then by considering it as only one instance of the totalitarianism which was, for her, an innovation of the 20th century. She recognized,

of course, that there had been dictatorial and repressive governments before this century, and that there had also been many instances of cruelty by individuals acting in the name of governments. What was distinctive for her about totalitarianism, which was epitomized for her in the concentration camps of the Nazis (and, also, she added, in the Russian Gulag), was one feature in particular: that here, for the first time, appeared an idea of evil which called for the extinction of man as an individual. Other forms of repression had been intended to intimidate people, to convert them to other doctrines or beliefs or even to destroy them. But in totalitarianism, according to Arendt, we find for the first time an *ideal* that the individual was to be eliminated as an individual: he was to become only an appendage, subordinate to a larger historical purpose. "Totalitarianism," she writes, "strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous." That this "superfluity of man," the elimination of the individual person should be held as a principle — or, even, for that matter, as a possibility — was, in Arendt's view, something that even the extreme instances of barbarism in the past had not discovered. Moreover, this principle affects everyone caught up in the net of totalitarianism, its perpetrators as well as its victims. It may seem odd to consider the agents of totalitarianism under the same heading as we do its victims, but Arendt was prepared to go this far as well: in totalitarianism, as in many other systems of evil, the perpetrator himself also was affected, if not in the same *terms*, but equally fundamentally. At its extreme, totalitarianism obliterates individual freedom and reason on both sides: the superfluity of man, in other words, becomes a general principle, encompassing the system as a whole and everyone caught up by it.³

It is to this aspect of totalitarianism — which comes into existence only as recent means of social organization and recent means of technology make it possible — that the phrase used here, the "politics of evil," refers. For what Arendt implies here is not just that one form of political expression represents evil to a degree beyond the capacity of any single system *or* individual; it is, in effect, the epitome of evil. The most radical expression of evil, in other words, is political and not simply moral (meaning by the latter, the decisions or acts of an individual like Iago or even Satan) — and we can understand how Arendt reaches this conclusion. Before the 20th century, it was reasonable to assume that the control of individual conscience or freedom rested finally, for better *or* for worse, in the hands of individuals acting on their own. But for totalitarianism as a system, evil is intrinsic, not something separately decided on; as a system, furthermore, it is more effective in accomplishing the goals of evil than any individual decisions or acts could be, no matter how monstrous. Evil which traditionally has been associated with individual decisions and

3. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1966), pp. 456-457.

acts, turns out, in the lesson taught by the 20th century, to be political rather than moral.

How, then, do we come back from the politics of evil to the banality of evil? But remember again Arendt's characterization of Eichmann's banality — for we see him now as exemplifying what she has described as the effects of totalitarianism. Eichmann, who was himself the *agent* of totalitarianism, abetting the work of the death camps which were its fullest expression, was also an expression or symptom, in some perverse sense also a victim, of that political form. He was, himself, superfluous as a human being, retaining the appearance of a person, but lacking the capacity for freedom and reason that were, for Arendt, essential to the definition of any such being. Arendt goes so far as to claim that totalitarianism had produced a change not only in how people acted toward each other, but in human nature itself, in what man was. This was an extreme claim which has in turn itself been disputed by her critics — but it is by understanding its extremity that we now also understand her account of Eichmann and the banality of evil.

To be sure, the fact that the account I have given finds connections among quite separate parts of Arendt's thinking does not mean that those connections (even if the formulation here were accepted) are not also open to question. When Arendt describes the phenomenon of Nazism simply as an instance of totalitarianism in general, or when she equates the Nazi death camps with the Russian Gulag — it may well seem that she overlooks important differences. And, again, the question arises of whether 20th century totalitarianism is, indeed, the innovation that she says it is, either in the history of politics or in the history of evil: it has been argued, on the other side, that genocide itself is not peculiar to the 20th century. There remain, finally, the questions which her account of totalitarianism raises about the issue of guilt and responsibility. If Eichmann acted as he did because of the expression of totalitarianism as a political form, in what sense was he — or anyone else — responsible for what was done? And how does one explain the fact that some Germans avoided, or in a few cases even resisted, being caught up in the killing operations of the Nazis?

These are all compelling questions, and it is not clear to me how Arendt would have answered them or, indeed, if she could answer them. But there is at least one side of her account which Arendt extends consistently and constantly — and this is the connection that she emphasizes between politics and the public life, on the one hand, and the moral life of the individual, on the other. It is not surprising, in fact, that, for Arendt, politics should engender the most extreme form of evil — for, at the other end of the spectrum, it is politics that makes goodness possible in the first place. This discussion began with certain references to the distinction between their public and their private lives that generations of German Jews had taken as an ideal. Arendt did not deny that there could

or should be differences — a space — between these two domains, but it was much more important for her that there should be a basic consistency between them, with the public life assuring the means that make the private life of judgment and thought possible. The reason why, in her view, the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century failed, notwithstanding its high-minded promises of the rights and dignity of man, was the same reason that the Enlightenment also came to be inculcated in the origins of totalitarianism: the political structures required to assure those rights had never been set up. The political structures which *had* evolved could not guarantee to minorities the rights that the idealistic rhetoric had spoken about — because the structure did not allow minorities to speak in their own voice.

In this sense, although Arendt did not apply the term to herself, she was, in contemporary terms, a conservative. It was, for her, only the individual communal unit or council, even the much-maligned nation — in any event, a unit that was the expression of a particular not a universal voice — that would assure the rights of particular citizens and their particular interests. On this basis, when she considered the question of Zionism, Arendt argued for the need, and then for the legitimacy, of the State of Israel. The Jews had lived, she contended, as a “Pariah” people, as outcasts. The basic character of their existence in Europe was what she called Jewish “worldlessness,” a condition in which they had no public life — or at least no *assurance* of such a life. And for these liabilities, the State of Israel was a solution — although, as history was to turn out, her conception of the political structures and policies that Israel *should* adopt was sharply at odds with the directions in which Israel went. From the same arguments used to endorse a balance between the private and the public life, moreover, came her opposition to the idea of a world government which would, in her view, overpower the private domain; it would be, she wrote, “the worst tyranny imaginable.”⁴ If governments did not have limits, they would be unwilling to express the particular interests of the diverse groups of their citizens.

Obviously, these views of Arendt’s are open to dispute. But however we judge them in themselves, one conclusion which seems undeniable follows from them collectively — and this is her claim for the necessary relation between political structures and the moral life of the individual. In some sense, to be sure, this relation is obvious: *of course*, our social or political surroundings have consequences for what we are, or do, as individuals. And, of course, the domain of private belief or conscience cannot simply be replaced by the public one. But Arendt’s point goes deeper than these, as it attempts to show what the connections between the two are, how they work. Even here, of course, there is room for disagreement — as is also, and more emphatically, true for her study of Eichmann. But

4. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 44.

notwithstanding such possibilities, it is worth remarking that Arendt remains one of only a very few writers willing even to try to characterize evil in the form that it took during the Holocaust. There have been studies and biographies aplenty of Nazi leaders, and there have been attempts, on the other side, to analyze figures in the Holocaust who were morally exemplary. But few studies other than hers have attempted to analyze the events of the Holocaust as the evil which virtually everyone agrees appears there.

Thus, notwithstanding the criticism that has been directed against other aspects of Arendt's work, her conception of the relation between politics and the life of the individual, between the public domain and private conscience, and, eventually between good and evil, remains. She continually revised her position on the details of these relations; in her later writings, the balance she had seen between the public and the private domains shifted much more strongly in the direction of the private (her last book, still being written when she died in 1975, was titled, *The Life of the Mind*). But one might think of this shift, too, as only another swing of the pendulum, not as an attempt to settle her last word on the subject. Arendt, I have suggested, was more given to ambivalence or irony than to last words, anyway. This was, itself, her most basic commitment: that, for anyone who thought independently, there *would* always be another word to be said. This does not mean that it is impossible to judge between good and evil — and, indeed, I have been suggesting that it is here, in her account of totalitarianism and the politics of evil, that Arendt's contribution to that judgment developed. Her account of the politics of evil reflected the conflict between the private and public domains which had affected her own life as it did the lives of almost every European Jew in the first half of the 20th century. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the same conflict, in only slightly different terms, continues in the present as well.

The Republican Party and the Jews

HERBERT L. SOLOMON

AS ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IS nearly in full swing, the “Jewish vote” takes on its usual quadrennial importance. Once again presidential hopefuls are rushing to ingratiate themselves with Jewish voters. They try to outdo each other by making extravagant promises on issues that concern the Jewish community, especially those relating to Israel and Soviet Jewry. They seek endorsements from every sector of organized Jewish life, frequently embellishing their viewpoint so that it appeals to the ideology of a particular group.

Once again, too, as has been happening every four years since the '30s, predictions are being made that this election will be the one when Jews will sever their connections to the Democratic Party. Intelligent reasons are presented why a majority of Jewish voters will switch, but so far the prophets have always been proven wrong. Will the 1988 election be different? The likelihood is that, yes, it will be, and that the Republicans will significantly improve their standing in the Jewish community.

The purpose here is to review the political behavior of American Jews, the dynamics that shape their party affiliations and the reason why the Republicans, at long last, are on the threshold of capturing the Jewish vote.

Both Democrats and Republicans understand how important Jewish support can be. Aside from political activism and substantial financial contributions — indispensable in every campaign — they know that a large percentage of Jewish voters actually turn out on Election Day. They also know that Jews are concentrated in large states that are all-important in our winner-take-all system. In 1976, for example, New York Jewish voters were crucial in Jimmy Carter's victory, giving him 80% of their vote. Had they split their vote evenly between Carter and Gerald Ford, Carter would have lost New York State and, with it, the presidency.

For some 40 years, 1932 to 1972, presidential candidates of the Republican Party campaigned vigorously for Jewish votes. Some of them believed, rather wishfully, in the optimistic predictions of Jewish support. But, realistically, they entertained little prospect of attracting a majority of Jewish voters. In those years Jews overwhelmingly supported the Democratic candidate, at times with as much as 90% of their votes. In the 11 presidential elections of that period, support by all American voters, Jews and non-Jews, for the Democratic nominee averaged 52%. The Jewish

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vote, by contrast, averaged 80%, a political pattern remarkably distinct from the rest of American society.

The inability of the Republican Party to gain headway with Jews in this 40-year period was contrary to its success in the prior 64-year period, 1860 to 1924. In those years, which included 17 presidential elections, Jews almost always voted for Republicans, the party of Abraham Lincoln. The one exception occurred when a majority of Jews voted for the scholarly Woodrow Wilson. But in those elections a majority of all citizens also voted for the Republican nominees (excepting Wilson and Grover Cleveland). Although precise percentages of the Jewish vote are not available for that period, historical evidence indicates that Jewish political behavior coincided, in general, with that of the entire population, primarily because there were no crucial Jewish issues dividing the two major parties.

The 1928 presidential election was the first in which the Jewish vote was significantly different from that of most American citizens. The Democratic nominee was Alfred E. Smith, a Roman Catholic, and Jews identified with this "minority" candidate. After all, Catholics then were also victims of bigotry and discrimination; if a Catholic could become president it would mean that prejudice was waning. On the political continuum Smith could be considered a "liberal" as understood in today's terminology. But, in 1928, the liberal-conservative dichotomy was not fully developed, nor was it the chief distinguishing factor between the two parties. The Democratic Party's main attraction to Jews was its Catholic candidate, not its ideology or program.

The decisive shift to the Democratic Party by Jewish voters began in 1932. Franklin D. Roosevelt was then the Democratic standard-bearer, as he was in the subsequent three elections. He was immensely popular, winning 58% (average) of all votes in the four campaigns. Jewish voters backed him almost totally, giving him an astounding 86% (average). Clearly, Roosevelt, with his Jewish appointees to the Cabinet and Supreme Court, his Jewish advisors and what was then perceived as his sympathy with the plight of European Jewry, captured the Jewish emotions and imagination.

The Democratic shift was also propelled by more enduring matters. Roosevelt was the patriarch of modern liberalism. The New Deal, with its dramatic thrusts to lift the United States out of a disastrous depression, sharpened Democratic and Republican differences into an ideological schism: liberalism vs. conservatism. The prevailing perception, one that lingers to this day, was that Democrats cared for the poor, unemployed, elderly, sick and underprivileged, while the Republicans, representing the well-to-do, were rather indifferent to the less fortunate.

Liberalism and conservatism, although difficult to define with precision, have become the most ubiquitous terms in modern political jargon. Ambiguous as the terms were (and are), Jews latched on to liberalism and the Democratic Party with unrelenting loyalty.

It was understandable for Jews in those early years to do so. Most Jewish families consisted of first and second generation immigrants from eastern Europe. For them it had been a struggle — to adapt and adjust, to rise from poverty, to move from pushcarts, sweatshops and decrepit tenements into a better life. Hence, they supported the working class objectives of the New Deal such as trade unionism, plant safety, unemployment insurance and social security.

Similarly, Jews fought for equality, democracy, freedom, church-state separation, civil liberties, civil rights. The black struggle for equality was personalized by Jews. The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, a coordinating agency of more than 100 organizations, stated that “The struggle for equal rights and opportunities without regard to race or color overshadows everything else in significance for Jewish community relations.” The fact that race and color were specified while religion was omitted was no accident. Jewish leadership saw the black revolution for equal rights as an extension of their own struggle. The subjugation of blacks or any other minority made the Jews keenly aware of their own vulnerability. Black progress would solidify Jewish progress.

Jews also favored the liberal goal of international equality among nations. They well understood the evils of the modern state system, of rivalries between countries, of separate nations pursuing their own needs. Jews, therefore, believed in the United Nations, the international bill of rights, disarmament and one-world concepts.

All such views, comprising the liberal package, were opposed by the conservatives and by most Republican legislators.

I believe that the problem of race relations [said Barry Goldwater], is best handled by the people directly concerned . . . Restore prayers in the classroom . . . Foreign aid, deference to the United Nations, the nuclear test ban, advocacy of general disarmament . . . [are] leading us to national and international disaster.

Regarding attitudes toward the State of Israel, it should be noted that, prior to the wars against Israel by Arab countries in 1967 and 1973, which placed the very existence of the Jewish state in jeopardy, the issue of Israel was neither decisive nor divisive in the American political scene. Both Democrats and Republicans were officially pro-Israel. Though anti-Israel sentiments were displayed by some members of both parties, the conservatives were considered untrustworthy, partly because of their anti-internationalist tendencies. In addition, in the 30 years from Roosevelt to Nixon the intervening liberal Democratic presidents (Truman, Kennedy and Johnson) appeared to be steadfast in their support of Israel, while the one Republican (Eisenhower) seemed equivocal. The Eisenhower-Dulles intimation of “even-handedness” in the Middle East hardly appealed to the American Jews. Hence they came to believe that the true friends of Israel were to be found in the Democratic Party.

Aside from specific issues, the underlying orientation of liberalism, viz., its attitude toward change, fitted the Jews perfectly. Conservatives, then and now, resist change; liberals welcome it. To the Jews, liberalism's advocacy of huge societal modifications represented hope for an amelioration of their diminished standing in American society.

Thus, the initial affinity of Jews to liberalism and the Democratic Party was reasonable, based as it was on their status, needs and aspirations. But why the passionate, almost total commitment? Why the fervid loyalty for about 40 years even after circumstances changed considerably?

One explanation is that Jewish attachments to liberalism emanate from the wellsprings of Judaism. It is maintained that history, tradition, religion, culture — the Torah itself — have so shaped and conditioned the Jews that they have acquired a built-in sympathy for the oppressed, the underdogs and the victimized.

Such lofty interpretations of Jewish liberalism are expounded frequently, especially by historians whose affinity is for broad, philosophical concepts. To connect current events to the preachings of the Prophets or to vindicate conservation of the environment, for example, by harking back to the Biblical words, "When you besiege a city . . . you shall not destroy the trees thereof by swinging an axe against them," is interesting, perhaps reassuring; it is not, however, an explanation. It cannot account for why certain people, at certain times, in certain places will favor or oppose a specific issue, especially the type of issue that divides liberals and conservatives.

The religious explanation is the least adequate. The logic of this approach would imply that Orthodox Jews are the strongest liberals. Actually, the Orthodox are among the least liberal. In 1984, for example, whereas only 39% of all Jews voted for Ronald Reagan, about 85% of the ultra-Orthodox chose Reagan over the liberal Walter Mondale. Basing liberalism on Biblical foundations or on Jewish tradition is a proposition that is impossible to substantiate. Indeed, it is shallow and presumptuous to link Judaism to any particular political viewpoint.

Political opinions and attitudes are concrete, pragmatic and current, not ethical or moral. Jewish political preferences are a reflection of the economic, social and cultural processes operative at the time. The initial gravitation by Jews toward liberalism was due, not to some inborn altruism, but to practical considerations that were sensible, justifiable and understandable.

Yet, political attitudes fluctuate, issues lose their prominence, economic and social circumstances change. Why, then, did the Jewish community cling to liberalism and the Democratic Party with such tenacity that liberalism became what was called "the secular religion of the Jews"?

A major part of the explanation relates to a uniquely Jewish condition: a community-wide feeling of insecurity. This condition, a vague sense of portending danger, is the underlying driving force in Jewish po-

litical and social attitudes. Sometimes described as anxiety or apprehension, it is pervasive, permeating all levels of American Jewry including rich and poor, scholars, working people, business leaders, the sophisticated, the religious, even the fully assimilated. Virtually all Jews harbor some degree of uncertainty about their unqualified acceptance in American life. Anti-Semitism in any part of the world makes them worry; native anti-Semitism, no matter how trivial, makes them shudder. Justified or not, the feeling of insecurity affects every stratum of Jewish life, producing a linkage among all American Jews and, indeed, among all Jews everywhere in the world.

In the earlier decades of this century such apprehension was quite pronounced; it was omnipresent and deeply felt. Jews faced bigotry and discrimination. They were blacklisted in many occupations. Exclusionary quotas kept their children out of better colleges. Anti-Semitism was overt, frequently encountered, institutionalized and blaringly expressed in the media. For the Jews it was a daily battle for acceptance and equality.

Consequently, a considerable part of liberalism's appeal was due to Jewish distrust of, and animosity toward, conservative policies and behavior, which were perceived as actual or incipient threats to Jewish safety. Conservatism (read: Republican Party) was considered reactionary, intolerant and jingoistic. It was believed to be the stronghold of those who oppose all change toward a fairer society and, as such, it attracted racists, anti-Semites and extremists. To many in the Jewish community, right-wing was almost synonymous with Father Coughlin, Gerald L.K. Smith and America-Firsters with their Hitler-like mentalities. Just about all of the traditional enemies of the Jews came from the traditional right-wing. Regardless of important differences, Jews fused the right, conservatism and the Republican Party into one political concept which they considered a potential menace to their security in America.

Jewish disaffection from conservatism can be traced to the years immediately prior to the entry of the United States into World War II. Most of the conservatives who opposed the liberal New Deal policies of President Roosevelt also opposed intervention in the war and, with other right-wing partisans, they joined in a loosely structured movement called "isolationism."

The isolationist adherents included genuine pacifists and other activists who sincerely believed that the conflict was a European problem best left to the Europeans. It also included pro-German and pro-fascist sympathizers. But the prominence of Hitler's anti-Jewish crusade catapulted the Jewish issue into the controversy in the United States. The isolationist movement, accordingly, also attracted committed anti-Semites. Quickly, the position of the isolationist bloc evolved into blaming Jews for the pro-war pressure. In effect, isolationism, at the time, reeked with an anti-Jewish flavor. And to Jews, isolationism was synonymous with conservatism.

Numerous political events served to maintain the Jewish anti-conservative bias. The presidential campaigns of Nixon against Kennedy in 1960, Goldwater against Johnson in 1964 and the 1968 independent effort of George Wallace (an “embryonic Hitler,” according to the *Jewish Advocate*), all provided Jews with steady examples of conservative failings. Whether extreme or moderate, conservatism could make no significant inroads among American Jews. In New York State, the Conservative Party's candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1962 mustered a mere 1% of the Jewish vote; in 1968 it was 5%. Even in the 1970 election, the Conservative Party's James Buckley, who won the senatorial election, received only 13% of the Jewish vote. Yet, the New York Conservative Party membership was far removed from extremism. The use of the conservative label was simply not conducive to gaining favor from the Jewish community.

American Jews, then, adopted liberalism and the Democratic Party with the fervor of a religious faith. The basic impetus was the struggle against anti-Semitism and the feeling of insecurity. The reasons for choosing liberalism came from two related sources. One was the general concurrence between the liberal program and Jewish self-interests at the time. The other, equally important, was the belief that conservatives, hence the Republican Party, were actually or potentially anti-Jewish.

* * *

Beginning about 20 years ago and continuing to this day, gradual changes in Jewish life — social, economic, cultural — are resulting in a loosening of liberalism's hold on Jewish attitudes. Questions are arising whether liberalism is really “good for the Jews.” Interestingly, and ironically, the very forces that had originally spurred Jews into the liberal fold are now inducing them to consider conservatism as an alternative.

An essential of liberalism, which attracted the Jewish community some 50 years ago, is a disdain for the status quo and a propensity for change. Does this coincide with the Jewish situation today? Hardly at all. Jews, who are better educated and have higher incomes than most other groups in America, do not want to rock the boat. They are part of the establishment, with an immense stake in the existing social and economic order. They have “made it” and do not welcome upheavals in societal relationships. The conservative philosophy of maintaining the status quo, therefore, now meshes neatly with Jewish needs.

This about-face in Jewish attitudes toward change is even more understandable when the underlying motivating forces are examined. Previously, the feeling of insecurity and the apprehension about anti-Semitism made Jews amenable to programs advocating a rearrangement of existing societal patterns. Insecurity, still an impelling force (albeit a much lesser one) in Jewish political conduct, is now directed toward preservation of positions already achieved. And although anti-Semitic attitudes are far from non-existent in the United States, most overt, organ-

ized anti-Jewish behavior (as distinguished from prejudice) is limited to reckless actions by small groups of extremists. Blatant anti-Semitic viewpoints are rarely expressed in the media and, when they do appear, they are sharply condemned and usually retracted immediately. Consequently, a major part of whatever anxiety is experienced by Jews today is generated, not so much by fear of anti-Semitism, but by worries that changes will disrupt the prevailing balance, resulting in a diminution of hard-won attainments. Whereas the earlier Jewish insecurity was an impetus for change, present concerns lead Jews to identify with the conservative posture which favors the conventional, the familiar, order, continuity and stability.

Jews are also moving away from many of the liberal policies previously supported so enthusiastically. Internationalism is not a Jewish desideratum any more. The United Nations is seen as a gang-up against Israel and world Jewry; in the words of Abba Eban, "The United Nations is the world center of anti-Semitism." Most Jews are cool, often hostile, to liberal programs of assistance to third-world nations which are perceived as enemies of Israel and Judaism. The Jewish community which advocates military aid to Israel can no longer, at the same time, support the liberal call for huge reductions in the U.S. military budget.

The shining idealism of the fight for equality, previously a Jewish *sine qua non*, has lost its glitter. Civil rights, school integration, open-housing, and the whole package of liberal demands for equality, had been deeply-felt issues for the Jews. They identified with such struggles, which they considered to be in their own self-interests. Now, the new civil rights agenda with its emphasis on immediate results is viewed by many Jews as a threat. Preferential treatment, proportional allocation of jobs, and quotas are seen as reverse discrimination which are undermining hard-won Jewish achievements. The editor of *Commentary* went so far as to proclaim, "Quotas are the most serious threat to Jews since World War II."

Similarly, the passionate attachment to trade-unionism, fair employment laws and working-class objectives is no longer very meaningful to Jews, the vast majority of whom are not in blue-collar jobs. The lingering Jewish support for "proletarian" goals is due primarily to a nostalgic remembrance of past struggles.

This break with their former commitments is painful for Jews. In the fight for trade-unionism and civil rights they felt part of a noble effort, a crusade for human dignity and equality, an idealistic expression of yearnings that Jews carried for so long. To this day the official publications of the Jewish establishment and the mouthings of prominent spokesmen still include a perfunctory moral attachment to the battle. But they are out of touch with their constituencies. The truth is that these fundamental tenets of liberalism are no longer important imperatives for most Jews.

Regarding Israel, the former Jewish distrust of conservative sincerity

has now shifted to doubts of liberal trustworthiness. The first signs of these doubts were evident in 1972. The Democratic nominee, George McGovern, was the most liberal major party candidate for president in modern times. Because of his third-world sympathies, however, he was considered by Jews as unreliable vis-à-vis Israel. In the race against Republican Richard Nixon, who four years earlier had garnered a mere 15% of Jewish votes, Jews gave Nixon more than a third of their votes, the largest total for a Republican presidential candidate in almost 50 years. Since then, the staunch pro-Israel members of Congress have often been the Republicans. Today, conservatives, ultra-conservatives and the politically powerful Religious Right are unequivocal in their support of Israel (although their voting record in the Senate does not match their rhetoric). The liberal coalition, on the other hand, includes new-leftists, pacifists and third-world admirers, all of whom are lukewarm toward Israel's needs. To many Jews, so attuned to every nuance relating to Israel's needs, the liberals (thus the Democratic party) are at best unreliable and, at worst, a potential threat to Israel's safety.

The paramount issue, however, compared to which all others are secondary, is anti-Semitism. Jews can disagree on internationalism, civil rights and even about specific policies toward Israel, but they are united against any expression of anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination. Of course, old-fashioned anti-Semitism — crude, blunt, nasty, stereotypical blatherings — is rarely encountered in the American political arena today. Any politician who is tainted with it, however faintly, can expect a negligible percentage of the Jewish vote.

Nowadays, it is the “new” anti-Semitism, usually cloaked euphemistically as anti-Zionism, that so irritates the Jewish community. It reveals itself as an indifference and insensitivity to Jewish concerns in the United States and worldwide. The evident fact is that pockets of such “soft” anti-Semitism are more often found, not in the right, but in the left. Most of it emanates from new-left and black radicalism, but, because of liberalism's sympathy for, and connections with, new-left and black demands, there is a vague anti-Jewish quality about the entire liberal establishment. At the same time, conservatives and the Republican Party are visibly straining to overcome their negative reputation by advocating, sponsoring and speaking out in favor of positions that serve Jewish interests.

There are, assuredly, many areas and issues (e.g., women's rights, gay rights, abortion, environmental policies, welfare programs, gun control) where most Jews concur with the liberal position. Although what passes for liberalism today is quite removed from the early liberalism that was so attractive to the Jewish community, polls indicate that Jews are still more liberal than the rest of white America and are still disproportionately represented in liberal groups. It is obvious that there has not been a mass Jewish conversion from liberalism to conservatism; it is hard to change one's political faith. The route between liberalism and conserva-

tism covers a long distance. Having made a right turn at the liberal station does not mean American Jews have traveled the entire road to the conservative station. But, they are on the way. Although not many would agree with the writer in *National Review* who claims that “Jewish liberalism is the chief enemy today of Jewish survival,” the truth is that liberalism may become a thing of the past in Jewish society. American Jews are shopping for a new security blanket, and they may very well end up buying the one labeled “conservatism.”

* * *

Jews may, indeed, turn to conservatism (many think they should) but, so far, they have not shown it in their voting patterns. In the past four presidential elections the Jewish vote for the Republican candidate has varied between 33% and 39%. In the 1984 and 1986 Congressional elections, it was 30%. The Republican Party's inability to make further gains — at least to reach 50% — is, at first glance, a political anomaly. Here are the American Jews, numbering 6,000,000, most of whom are highly educated, well-to-do, talented and influential. By most objective criteria they belong in the conservative ranks. Much of the liberal credo runs contrary to their genuine needs and self-interests. Yet, they vote for Democrats.

A graphic illustration of this anomaly occurred in 1984. Almost everyone voted for Ronald Reagan: Protestants and Catholics, Irish and Italians, men and women, young and old — by a margin of 10 to more than 20 percentage points. Politically, it added up to a colossal landslide. Who voted for Walter Mondale? Blacks (90%), Hispanics (65%) and Jews (66%). The Black and Hispanic preference for Mondale was understandable and no surprise. But why did American Jews, in a remarkable disregard of the Reagan avalanche, decisively veer to the opposite direction, giving Mondale an immense margin of 34 percentage points? Are the Jews really so different? Are their interests and concerns at such variance with the rest of white America?

Of course not. Jews reacted to Reagan's personality, sincerity and many of his achievements in the same positive manner as did everyone else. The economic upturn, inflation slowdown and the general optimistic climate was as gratifying to Jews, perhaps even more so, as it was to most Americans. And Reagan's pro-Israel rating was higher than ever. Moreover, disenchantment with the Democratic Party's indirect flirtation with the anti-Semitism of Louis Farrakhan was widespread in the Jewish community. The Democrats' initial neglect to incorporate into its platform an anti-bigotry plank left a bitter aftertaste. Mondale's fainthearted circumspection regarding Jesse Jackson's anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiments, diminished considerably his appeal in the Jewish community. Considering that, in 1980, Jimmy Carter's Jewish vote exceeded Reagan's by a mere 6 percentage points, all indications pointed to a large increase

in support for the Republican standard-bearer. But, confounding the experts and brushing aside seemingly sensible reasons for voting Republican, two out of three Jews voted for Mondale the Democrat (except the ultra-Orthodox whose views, in any event, are outside of the Jewish mainstream).

The stubborn loyalty of Jews to the Democrats is attributed by some political pundits to old-fashioned or born-again liberalism, or to however one defines liberalism these days. This reasoning has little plausibility because it cannot explain why Jews retain a pro-liberal bias when their self-interests, which have changed so much over the years, now point in another direction. Actually, there is no anomaly. What is involved is neither loyalty to the Democratic Party nor some mysterious eternal addiction to liberalism. Instead, to put it plainly, Jews still do not trust conservatives.

True, conservatives today fare better than do liberals on many matters that are important to American Jewry. But there is still the overriding concern of Jews with what are perceived as threats to their security. It is not the old anti-Semitism of 50 years ago nor the anti-Zionist form of recent years that are so worrisome. It is, rather, the new political thrusts by Christian Fundamentalists and Evangelical Protestants to "Christianize" America. It is here that Republicans, who have become partners with the Religious Right, are irritating Jewish sensibilities. This partnership, called the New Right, is felt to be a direct menace, and nothing coalesces Jewish people more than when they are confronted by what they believe is a threat to their security.

Jews are angry when Jesus and Christianity are constantly invoked by Reagan, his associates, campaign manager and ardent supporters. Jews feel their position in society is endangered by the New Right's push for prayers in public schools and the sanctioning of Christian displays on public property. Hardly a month passes without some prominent Republican making a Christian-oriented statement or proposal that causes Jews to wince.

The President, at his first campaign stop in 1984, proclaimed, "We have a promise from Jesus to soothe our sorrows . . . And by dying for us, Jesus showed how far our love should be ready to go." Doesn't he (let alone his writers) understand that such words make Jews feel like outsiders? When the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee airs a commercial urging young people to have "a close relationship with Christ," how does it expect Jewish young people to react? While pushing for school prayers, Bob Sweet, White House senior staff member in 1986, gloated, "It is an indication of what can be done if the Christian people in America join together on a particular issue." How are Jews supposed to respond? Paul Laxalt, a member of Reagan's inner circle, sent a letter to 45,000 ministers urging support for the Reagan-Bush ticket. The salutation was, "Dear Christian Leader," followed by, "As leaders under God's authority we cannot afford neutrality." Aren't Rabbis also leaders

under God's authority? For the opening prayer at their national convention, the Republicans selected Rev. James Robison who once shocked the Jewish community by saying, "An anti-Semite is someone who hates Jews more than he's supposed to." And then we have Rev. Pat Robertson who, because of his hold on millions of evangelical voters, is a major power in the Republican Party. Although he speaks in tongues, he was understood very well by Jews when he announced some time ago, that "The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous document for self-government by Christian people."

It is understandable that Jews recoil at the constant barrage of such statements, all emanating from Republican stalwarts. Jewish sensitivities, sharpened by centuries of persecution, respond intuitively with opposition to "Christians Only" manifestations. When Reagan says, "We have respected every other religion. They're free to practice in our country," Jews are justifiably incensed at what they interpret as a not-so-subtle implication that they are merely being tolerated in this Christian nation.

Thus the Republican Party continues to alienate the Jewish public. It took many decades to overcome its reputation as the party that attracted disgruntled anti-Semites. Regarding the new anti-Semitism that is expressed in anti-Israel terms, the Republicans, with their ardent pro-Israel position, are relatively free of criticism. But, in their alliance with the Religious Right, they are forced into placating their Evangelical partners by constant affirmations of Jesus-centered policies. To a majority of Jews this direction of the Republican Party appears more menacing than the "soft" anti-Semitism of Jesse Jackson or of the left in general. (This is the only explanation for the inability of most Jews to vote for Reagan in 1984.) Jews who have not felt comfortable in Republican circles since the '30s are not being made very welcome now. Paul Weyrich, editor of *Conservative Digest*, is correct in bemoaning the Republicans' weakness in making conservative Jews "part of the action and part of the leadership."

There is evidence, however, that the power of the Religious Right has passed its peak. Its influence in shaping Republican priorities is diminishing. In the 1986 Senatorial elections, most of the candidates who were strongly supported by conservative religious groups were soundly defeated. One survey indicated that endorsements by Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority had a negative impact and Falwell, accordingly, has retired from the political battles. The Jim and Tammy Bakker scandals have weakened the entire movement of television preachers. Pat Robertson's effort to win the Republican presidential primary has so totally collapsed that his influence in Republican policies will be miniscule. Moreover, the unique capacity of Ronald Reagan to galvanize old, new and religious conservatives into a powerful political force is just about ended and George Bush is hardly capable of resurrecting it. The special confluence of social, cultural, religious and political circumstances that catapulted the Religious Right into a leadership role in the Republican Party appears to be over.

In the light of these developments, the final barrier which prevented a majority of Jews from identifying with conservatism seems to have been removed. If, in addition, Republican candidates and spokespersons start eliminating iterations of themes slanted toward Christianity and Jesus, Jews will feel less excluded from Republican Party politics.

On the Democratic side there is evidence that the Jesse Jackson phenomenon has already loosened the party's hold on American Jewry. Should Jackson become the nominee for vice-president or, at the least, a powerful contributor to the ideology and progress of the Democratic party, his presidential role will continue to alienate sizeable sections of the Jewish community.

Thus, after 60 years, Jews are prepared to switch allegiances. Their needs, self-interests, status and attitudes are already directing them to the right. Liberal ties with the old-left, new-left and third-world admirers are causing more and more disenchantment with the Democratic Party. Since, in recent elections, the Republican Party has demonstrated that it has a grip on about one third of the Jewish votes, it is reasonable to expect an increase to about one half in the coming presidential election.

Political predictions are, of course, precarious. But, barring some devastating revelations that would distort all prior analyses, there is a strong likelihood that Election Day, 1988, will inaugurate a new political era for Jews in the United States.

Towards A Rehumanization Of The Akedah And Other Sacrifices

MOSHE MOSKOWITZ

THE ESSENCE OF HEROISM, THE ANCIENT Rabbis tell us, is not physical strength, but subjection to God's will and adherence to his Torah. "So long as the people of Israel turn their thoughts above and subject their hearts to their father in heaven, they prevail."¹ This is somewhat similar to the biblical concept that "Wisdom is better than valor" (Ecclesiastes 9:16), since "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Psalms 11:10).

There is no doubt that the biblical story in which unquestioning subjection to God's will receives its keenest, most moving and thought-provoking expression is the episode of the *akedah*, or the binding of Isaac. Here unflinching devotion to the deity receives its severest test, for Abraham, not only as the mythical father of his nation, but as a real and tangible father in a family situation, is asked to sacrifice his son to prove that devotion.

For mankind today, however, there may be some question as to whether such blind submission to what may be believed to be a divine decree is, in and of itself, courageous. Is there not a need for some truly human quality to shine forth in any relationship, be it between man and fellow man, or between man and God?

A connection between the human and the heroic may be found in the following statement by Joseph Campbell:

The hero . . . is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought.²

In view of the above, one is tempted to ask: who is the real hero of the *akedah*? Is it God, who demands an outrageous act, worse than any loyalty oath? Is it Isaac, being led like the proverbial sheep to the slaughter? Can it possibly be Abraham, who raises his voice to argue for the safety of the innocent in Sodom and Gemorrah,³ but who raises only a knife when it comes to his own son? Or, perhaps, carrying it to the extreme, it

1. *Rosh Hashanah* 29a.

2. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton, 1949), pp. 19-20.

3. Genesis 18:16-33.

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is the ram, actually rendering its life to God, that is the real hero. In other words, is there, in all of this story, an element of humaneness?

Interestingly enough, biblical scholarship in recent decades has made it explicit that the story does not reflect what might have been a step forward in the progress of mankind. As DeVaux has noted, "It is not concerned with polemics against human sacrifices, nor with the legitimizing of a new rite in which an animal would have replaced a human victim."⁴ Sarna, while recognizing the great complexity of the issues involved, also notes that "the *Akedah* narrative cannot be intended to mark the transition from human to animal sacrifice."⁵

Similarly, Gordis, stressing that the biblical account of the *akedah* should be accounted for on its own terms, also rejects the notion that it illustrates God's opposition to child sacrifice.⁶ Green, likewise, in his comprehensive review of the entire subject of human sacrifice in the ancient Near East, comes to the same conclusion.⁷

However, even granting, as some of these critics note, that the story in its final narrative form actually does reflect abhorrence at the idea of child sacrifice — an abhorrence so normative that it need not be expressed — the difficulty remains. The real issue, we are told, is obedience and faith; a very early core of Israelite tradition has been transformed to reveal the extent of that obedience, the depth of that faith.⁸ Yet can such devotion, faith, and love, in the context in which they appear, really be seen as anything other than adherence to a primitive barbaric ritual?

This is not to say that obedience to God is necessarily an evil thing. Indeed, in certain civilizations, progress may be measured in terms of that civilization's compliance with the will of an ethical and moral deity.⁹ Certainly the Israelites would have progressed spiritually and morally had they heeded the voice of their later prophets who proclaimed so powerfully that God did *not* want the sacrifice of their sons, or, indeed, any sacrifice, if not accompanied by right living. Not only did God not ask for human sacrifice, says Jeremiah, but it never even entered his mind. "And they have built the shrines of Tophet . . . to burn their sons and daughters in fire — which I never commanded, which never came to My mind" (Jeremiah 7:31). According to the prophet Amos, God is not the least interested in sacrifice or the tumultuous and conspicuous embellishment of cultic ritual: "But let justice well up like water, righteousness like an

4. Roland DeVaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff, 1964), p. 67.

5. Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1972), p. 158.

6. Robert Gordis, "The Faith of Abraham: A Note on Kierkegaard's 'Teleological Suspension of the Ethical,'" *JUDAISM*, (1976): 414-419.

7. Alberto R.W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series (Missoula, 1975), pp. 156-159.

8. Sarna, *Op. cit.*, pp. 159-162; Gordis, *Op. cit.*, p. 417.

9. Cf. George W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith" in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: Studies in the Development of a Literary Tradition*, ed. Eli Yassif (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 12, n. 11.

unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24). Perhaps it is in the prophecies of Micah that we find the antithesis of all the negative aspects of primitive ritual — guidance rather than taunting, sensibility rather than goading:

He has told you, O man, what is good,
And what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do justice
And to love goodness,
And to walk modestly with your God;
Then will your name achieve wisdom (Micah 6:8-9).¹⁰

How crude, cruel, and "testy" must the God of the *akedah* appear in the light of the above, "experimenting" as he does with Abraham in such aboriginal fashion. Yet, as we shall see, there is a humanizing grace to the whole strange episode if we permit ourselves to return to that world of dreams, imagination, and fanciful speculation that the ancient Rabbis wove in the face of such perplexities.¹¹

Understandably enough, there are instances in the Midrash where the Rabbis, as well, reject the notion that God could, or would, call for a human sacrifice. To them the concept that God could even suggest the sacrifice of Isaac as a test of faith is itself unthinkable. "I did not command Jephthah to sacrifice his daughter, I did not speak to the king of Moab that he should sacrifice his son, neither came it into my mind to tell Abraham to slay his son."¹²

Nevertheless, the Scriptures relate that God did, indeed, tell Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice,¹³ and so the Rabbis are still in a quandary. Therefore, if God did command Abraham to do such a thing, then, of course, He was sorry for doing so and seized upon the first available opportunity to issue a recall: "Abraham delayed in order to inspect the knife. Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, was stirred with compassion for Isaac."¹⁴

At times the Rabbis circumvent the thought that the God of the Israelites, "a God compassionate and gracious,"¹⁵ could desire human sacrifice, by ascribing to Him two clearly marked characteristics. Thus, all during the preparations for the sacrifice, until the very moment the knife is about to descend on Isaac, God is referred to as Elohim, an indication of the attribute of justice. From that point, and on to the end of the story, however, He is referred to as Yahweh, the indubitable expression of infinite mercy.¹⁶

The inconceivability of an actual sacrifice of Isaac is illustrated by

10. Cf. also Jeremiah 19:5, 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20, 23:36-39; Hosea 6:6. All biblical quotations are from the JPS *Tanakh*, 1985 edition.

11. Cf. Melvin Jay Glatt, "Midrash: The Defender of God," JUDAISM, 35 (1986):87-97.

12. *Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, *Va-Yera* 40:109.

13. Genesis 22:2.

14. *Tanhuma*, *Zav* 13; *Bereshit Rabbah* or Gen.22:13.

15. Exodus 34:6.

16. Cf. Nahmanides, on Gen. 22:12; *Sifre*, Deut. 27.

Rabbinical world-play. Thus, Moriah, the location for the proposed sacrifice, is linked to the Hebrew *temurah*, a substitute offering. God, it would appear, had never intended the actual sacrifice of Isaac, but, in choosing Moriah as the site, was already alluding to the substitute that He would provide.¹⁷ The entire issue of substitution, i.e., animal sacrifice instead of human, receives great emphasis in the Midrashim, and the principle of *agnus pro vicario* is seen as central to the story of the *akedah*.¹⁸

Furthermore, in its defense of God, and for greater amplification and clarification of the biblical text, Midrashic imagination often resorts to a certain concretization and fleshing-out of details and personalities. This process sometimes occasions touching but, also, surprising results. For example, it has often been pointed out that part of the uniqueness of the *akedah* story lies in its sparsity of detail, leaving much to the reader's imagination and projection of feelings.¹⁹ Thus, we are never told what Abraham feels upon hearing God's command, or, indeed, if he feels anything at all. The Rabbis, however, tell us that in answer to Isaac's question, "Where is the sheep for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22.2), Abraham responds by telling Isaac that he himself is the sheep. Upon hearing this, Isaac begins to weep and accuses Abraham of lying: "Father, father, so this is the Torah you talked about to my mother Sarah when you said, 'I am going to take him to the schoolmasters.'" At this point Abraham cannot contain himself and breaks down, weeping bitterly and tearing the hairs out of his head and beard.²⁰ Here Rabbinical fantasy seems to make the biblical characters rather less heroic in stature but also much more human and believable than they appear in the original. This humanizing attitude on the part of the Rabbis, however, can lead to a confrontation with God. In contrast to the robot-like appearance and actions of Abraham in Genesis 22, the Midrash gives us an Abraham who not only questions God, but argues with him in terms much more forceful than those which appear in the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18):

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| Abraham: | But thou surely didn't know that I was ready to sacrifice my son! |
| God: | It was manifest to me, and I foreknew it that thou wouldn't withhold not even thy soul from me. |
| Abraham: | And why, then, didn't thou afflict me thus? |
| God: | It was my wish that the world should become acquainted with thee . . . by Myself I swear! |
| Abraham: | Thou swearest, and also I swear, I will not leave this altar until I have said what I have to say! ²¹ |

17. *Pesikta Rabbati* 40.

18. Shalom Spiegel, "Me-Aggadot Ha-Akedah" (Hebrew), in *Akedat Yizhak: Mehkarim Be-Hitpathutah Shel Masoret Sifrutit*, ed. Eli Yassif (Jerusalem, 1978), esp. Chaps. 8,9,10.

19. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton, 1953), pp. 3-23.

20. Cited in Spiegel, *Op. cit.*, end of chap 6.

21. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1954), Vol. I, pp. 283-284.

It is in this context that Abraham accuses God of the inconsistency of mere mortals:

Is it with you . . . as with men talking, who say one thing one day and another the next? Yesterday you said "But my covenant I will retain with Isaac," and now you tell me to slaughter him! Where is the covenant?²²

Nevertheless, it should be noted that other Rabbinic interpretations place Abraham in a position which lags far behind contemporary standards of simple humanitarianism. In these Midrashim Abraham pleads with God, not to save his son, but for the ability and opportunity to complete the sacrifice, or, at the very least, to inflict some kind of bodily harm on him as a token of his good intentions. For example, the Rabbis tell us that not only Abraham and Isaac wept at the altar, but that the angels also wept and, as a result, the tears dissolved the knife. Abraham is thus unable to complete the sacrifice:

Abraham said: "Perhaps he is not fit for sacrifice. Shall I strangle him, burn him, or cut him up into pieces before you?" He said to him, "Do not you lay your hand!" Said Abraham to Him: "If so, I came for nothing. Let me maim him, let me at least draw some blood from him as proof, let me extract from him *one drop of blood!*" Said He to him, "Do not do a thing to him, don't you bruise him . . ." ²³

This seemingly sadistic stance of Abraham, however, should not be taken out of its tragical historical context. As Dov Noy has noted, the Rabbis often viewed the biblical story of the *akedah*, even with its rescue of Isaac at the last moment, as the quintessential model and archetype of all the martyrological acts known as Sanctification of the Name.

This expansion (of the biblical text) is expressed mainly by the addition of legendary motifs in the legends of the *akedah* . . . the majority of which are a direct result of the social and historical reality and of deeds of martyrdom during periods of oppressive decrees, persecutions, and forced conversion.²⁴

If, in the actual experience of the Rabbis, thousands gave, and eventually, millions would give, their lives, refusing to relinquish their Jewish identity and steadfastly proclaiming their belief and faith, then why, indeed, should Abraham not extract a single drop of Isaac's blood as an indication of some kind of actual sacrifice?

In view of the above, it is not surprising, then, that God's position vis-à-vis matters of cruelty and compassion is not only justified in various ways, but, also, at times, seems comprised. In *Midrash Tanhuma*, for example, and in other Midrashim, it is not God who prevents the sacrifice

22. *Midrash Tehillim* 29:1.

23. *Bereshit Rabbah*, 56:7; *Midrash Ha-Gadol* on Gen. 22:12; *Va-Yikra Rabbah*, 20:22. Spiegel, *Op. cit.*, Chap 6. n. 5, cites a most interesting Midrash wherein Abraham tells God that he will strangle Isaac, and then says to Him, "And may I trouble you to ask Sarah to give birth to another Isaac to fulfill what you promised me."

24. Dov Noy, "*Ha-Akedah Ke-Avtipus Shel Kiddush Ha-Shem*," in *Akedat Yizhak, Mehkarim* . . . (see footnote 18).

of Isaac, but Satan, wily in the extreme, arguing and scheming to prevent a human sacrifice.²⁵

What, then, is one to make of all these multiple and variegated interpretations? It would seem that, in matters of faith, the human imagination knows no bounds. Thus, in one instance, Abraham is devastated by God's command, and performs it only grudgingly, barely, with much show of emotion. In another, he is only too glad to perform the deed, even willing to hack his son to pieces, if that be God's will. And what of God Himself? Here He is portrayed as a kindly father, testing and jesting, without the least intention of permitting Abraham to carry out a horrendous deed, and there He is cruelly indifferent, willing to let the devil himself carry the ball, as it were, and appear "as a father has compassion for his children" (Psalms 103:13).²⁶

On this last point there can be no doubt. In the Midrash, God not only asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, but, at times, appears aloof, indifferent, and even capricious in doing so. Yet, even here, the Rabbis have a remedy, and it is precisely this remedy that we wish to emphasize.

In this particular Midrash, God asks for the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham complies unquestioningly, carrying out all of the details until the very last. All of this time, God is merely an observer, sitting idly by. Perhaps He may even be enjoying the scene, along with the meal and drink offerings. At the crucial moment, angels step in, appearing not as emissaries of God, but, rather, in *contraposition* to Him, as a kind of antithesis to His indifference. The angels weep and plead:

Sovereign of all the worlds! Thou art called merciful and compassionate, whose mercy is upon all His works; have mercy upon Isaac, for he is a human being, and the son of a human being, and is bound before Thee like an animal.²⁷

There it is. The angels plead with God to spare Isaac for, after all, he is a human being! Can there be a more simple and eloquent plea than this — not only on behalf of Isaac, but on behalf of all humanity? Yet this Midrash goes further, quoting Psalms 36:7 "Your beneficence is like the high mountains; your justice like the great deep; man and beast You deliver, O Lord." Man and beast! So the angels here not only invoke God's compassion with regard to Isaac, but plead for the ram as well!

Interestingly enough, a Yiddish paraphrase of the angel's cry might be more to the point, and perhaps even poignant: "*Got, hob rachmones oyf Yitzchakin; er is doch a mentsh!*"²⁸ A *mentsh*, in Yiddish, implies, however,

25. *Tanhuma, Va-Yera*, 22, 23, *Bereshit Rabbah* 56:4.

26. In all fairness to the Rabbis in *Tanhuma* (n. above), Satan is still portrayed as the personification of evil, for, immediately afterwards, disguised as Isaac, he goes to Sarah and tells her what Abraham would have done to him if not for God's intervention. Upon hearing these words, Sarah dies.

27. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer*, trans. Gerald Friedlander (London, 1916), pp. 227-228.

28. Cf. Hyman Grushkin, *Die Velt Fun Avrohom* (New York, 1966), pp. 225-273.

more than just a human being. It connotes firmness and compassion, fair judgment as well as tolerance, decisiveness tempered by patience, and a concern for the self mitigated by consideration of others, including nature — a blend of vital balances needed to make this precarious planet a better place to live in. Can God really afford the near-loss of such a breed?

It is the angels of this particular Midrash, therefore, who are true heroes of the *akedah*. It is most unfortunate, then, that during the long and tragic course of Jewish history, when so many Jews lost their lives on the principle of Sanctification of the Name, that these angels were not present to remind God that He had to do not merely with human beings, not merely with Jews, His Chosen People, but with *mentshen*.

Sweet Isaac

BERNHARD FRANK

Sweet Isaac tethered on that stone
listens to the coursing river
of his blood. Terror numbs his liver,
darkness raps against the bone.

Above, the face he thought he'd known —
a plaster-of-paris mask. Ashiver
sweet Isaac, tethered on that stone.
listens to the coursing river.

A vulture rends the monotone
of sky, dawn's light begins to quiver
in the knife. Lord, let the heart deliver
(from such blade as mind will hone)
sweet Isaac, tethered, on that stone.

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Mordecai M. Kaplan and the Retrieval of the Haskalah

EMANUEL S. GOLDSMITH

THROUGHOUT HIS LONG LIFE, MORDECAI M. Kaplan devoted his seemingly inexhaustible energy to redefining and reinterpreting Judaism. That activity was born of his unshakeable faith in the capacity of the Jewish people to reconstruct its historic way of life so as to ensure its survival and to facilitate its contribution to the survival and advancement of humanity. Although he is best known for defining Judaism as a civilization, as an evolving civilization and as an evolving *religious* civilization, Kaplan's most far-reaching redefinition was perhaps that of Judaism as "the ongoing life of a people intent upon keeping alive for the highest conceivable purpose, despite changes in the general climate of opinion."¹ In these words one hears echoes of a polemic against attempts to categorize particular ages in the annals of Jewry as "classical," "normative," or "axial."

To Kaplan, the designation of any specific period in the history of the Jewish people as pre-eminent was both an attempt to overemphasize the significance of that period at the expense of others and a denial of the evolutionary character of Judaism. He took exception, for example, to George Foot Moore's use of the term "normative Judaism" to refer to the Judaism of the first centuries of the Christian era. He pointed out that Moore identified "normative Judaism" with beliefs and practices which were, in fact, standardized subsequent to the rabbinic period. He also felt that Moore ignored the significance of polity and social structure which formed the framework within which Jewish life functioned. Kaplan preferred the term "Traditional Judaism" for the period that Moore discussed in his classic study (*Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 3 vols., [Cambridge, Mass., 1927]) because an evolving civilization is one which consists of different stages. Each stage differs both in form and content from the one preceding it and the one following it and it may be considered normative only for those who live within it. In any event, Kaplan saw the proto-Judaism of the Bible as more authoritative and, hence, more "normative" than Rabbinic Judaism.²

1. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 40.

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Greater Judaism in the Making* (New York, 1960), p. 515.

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Having said this, however, we must admit that Kaplan may himself be justly accused of preferring, above all others, one age of Jewish history — his own. And Kaplan's age, the age of modern Jewish history, is dominated by the *Haskalah*. As with the general Enlightenment, which is both a specific period in European history and the beginning of modern history generally, the *Haskalah* was both a particular phenomenon at a specific period in Jewish history and the beginning of all of modern Jewish history. It represents a movement within a specific period to which it lent its name and to which it imparted lasting significance, but

its aspirations and anxieties, its debates and methods are still with us in their original form . . . Though its values have been belittled by subsequent reaction, they appear increasingly meaningful to the survivors of the catastrophes of modern history.³

The *Haskalah* phenomenon, whose roots reach back to the historical explorations into the Jewish past by Azariah de Rossi in the sixteenth century and the critical analysis of the Bible by Barukh Spinoza in the seventeenth, constitutes the very shaking of the foundations of Jewish life. Although a case may be made for the inappropriateness of a term such as *Haskalah*, which means rationalism, for a phenomenon which embraces social reconstruction, religious radicalism, philosophical romanticism and literary innovation, *Haskalah* as an ideology or movement does involve the application of rational or objective as opposed to traditional or subjective criteria to the peoplehood, culture and religion of Jewry. The *Haskalah* undermined the spiritual and cultural walls which legitimized the dichotomies of tradition and objectivity, faith and truth, loyalty and criticism, religious and secular, eternal and temporal, universal and particular.

The *Haskalah* was the Jewish version of the general European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century which substituted this-worldliness, rationalism and universalism for the other-worldliness, authoritarianism and exclusivism of the medieval world. The Enlightenment has been characterized as

the hinge on which the European nations turned from the Middle Ages to "modern" times, marking the passage from a supernaturalistic-mythical-authoritative to a naturalistic-scientific-individualistic type of thinking.⁴

In its first, rationalist phase, the Enlightenment held that men should enjoy rights such as freedom of information, freedom of speech and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Some of its spokesmen also spoke of economic liberalism as a natural right. The men of the Enlightenment believed that people would have greater dignity and be happier if their social institu-

3. Hellmut O. Pape, "Enlightenment," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1973), vol. II, p. 89.

4. Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought* (New York, 1977), p. 141.

tions were based on reason and science rather than on tradition. The second phase of the Enlightenment, associated with Rousseau,

insisted that "reason" must accommodate itself to an inner moral sense, which in turn implied the duty of the individual to sacrifice his personal advantage to the moral welfare of the living community on which he depended. Although this community was the source of his own existence as a moral being, its legitimacy was, in the last resort, dependent on its satisfying the moral and material needs of the individuals who composed it.⁵

In sum, the Enlightenment

promoted the cause of freedom more widely, directly, positively than any age before it For the first time in history it carried out a concerted attack on the vested interests that opposed the diffusion of knowledge and the free exercise of reason.⁶

Mordecai Kaplan viewed the Enlightenment as both the most adventurous reliance upon reason and experience and the most daring revolt against political and religious authoritarianism that mankind had ever known.⁷ In *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, he quotes Carl L. Becker's summation of the essential articles of the religion of the Enlightenment:

1) Man is not natively depraved; 2) the end of life itself is the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death; 3) man is capable of being guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth; and 4) the first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition.

Kaplan believed that each of those principles had contributed to the radical transformation of the inner and outer conditions of human life, in general, and Jewish life, in particular. In the attempt to survive such a transformation, Judaism was experiencing metamorphosis.⁸

The Jewish Enlightenment or *Haskalah*, which began as the Jewish wing of the general European Enlightenment, was a crucial movement in modern Jewish history. The *maskilim*, or advocates of Enlightenment, sought, through education, religious reform and communal reorganization, to alter the contours of Jewish existence and, thus, modernize and "Europeanize" the Jewish people. The modern transformation of Jewish society, they hoped, would, in turn, lead to emancipation, integration and enfranchisement. The *maskilim* have long been held accountable for all of the ills of modern Jewish life. The truth of the matter is, however, that they were, by and large, loyal and committed Jews who struggled valiantly against overwhelming odds, both from within and without the Jewish community, to prove that a synthesis of Judaism with modernity was necessary, desirable and feasible. "Every thinker," writes John Dewey, "puts

5. Norman Hampson, *A Cultural History of the Enlightenment* (New York, 1968), p. 252.

6. Herbert J. Muller, *Freedom in the Western World* (New York, 1963), p. 321f.

7. *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, p. 183.

8. *Ibid.*, 168f.

some portion of an apparently stable world in peril, and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place.”⁹

The *Haskalah* was essentially a social and cultural trend with strong political, economic and religious overtones. It effected an aesthetic and literary awakening of magnitude and significance. It embraced rationalism, romanticism, scholarly research (*Wissenschaft*) and the rethinking and reevaluation, reformulation and reinterpretation of Judaism. It was also a Messianic movement, seeking to redeem the Jew from alienation and homelessness by encouraging him to become part of the countries of Europe and to embrace the culture and mores of the European peoples. The *maskilim* eventually succeeded in modernizing and secularizing European Jewry and in preparing it for emancipation and citizenship in the countries of Europe. They were responsible for the flowering of Hebrew and Yiddish letters, for the emergence of the modern trends in Jewish religion, for the development of modern Jewish literary and historical research, for the growth of Jewish socialism, nationalism and Zionism, and, ultimately, for the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty in the twentieth century. They brought about a revolution in Jewish life and cleared the way for modern Judaism.

The *Haskalah* movement began in the age of Moses Mendelssohn in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, yet, despite the fact that in the 1860s and 1870s (and especially after 1881) the leading advocates of *Haskalah* preferred to be referred to as socialists, nationalists, Lovers of Zion and Zionists, the *Haskalah* continues to this very day. The leading representatives of the *Haskalah* phenomenon, from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, certainly have as much, if not more, in common with each other than do the various books in the Hebrew Bible. A representative list of leading *maskilim* from Moses Mendelssohn to Mordecai Kaplan would have to include Nachman Krochmal, Isaac Baer Levinsohn, Peretz Smolenskin, Yitzchok Leybush Peretz, Ahad Ha'am, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Simon Dubnov and David Ben-Gurion. Geographically, the *Haskalah* spread from Central to Eastern, and Western Europe, to America and to Israel.

The *maskilim* advocated changes in Jewish occupations and economic practices as well as educational and religious reforms in order to “rectify the alleged backwardness of Jewry and eliminate the supposed irrational features of Judaism at that time.”¹⁰ They helped make Jews more self-aware and self-critical, attacking both the normal human failings of the Jewish community and the excesses of the *Kabbalah* and Hasidism. They fostered the emergence of a modern Jewish literature (including philosophy and history) in the Hebrew language and, later, in Yiddish as well, which could vie with the traditional religious culture. Manifestly, by sup-

9. John Dewey, *Characters and Events* (New York, 1929), vo. 1, p. xi.

10. Robert M. Seltzer, “Enlightenment,” *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York, 1987), p. 171.

planting belief with reason and the ideal of the traditional scholar-hero or Hasidic saint with that of the secular moral individual, the *Haskalah* gradually helped render traditional values and concerns extraneous to the modern thinking Jew.¹¹

The essence of Traditional Judaism as a unique life-style and culture-style had been the fact that every aspect of life and culture was interpenetrated by religion. According to Yehezkel Kaufmann

Jewish culture in its entirety was Torah. Jewish learning was the study of Torah . . . Torah was not simply sacred creativity that occupied a place alongside other cultural values. It was Jewish creativity *in toto* . . . Other disciplines and sciences, to the extent that they were not forbidden or disparaged, were considered of no real value; they had their place only if they were of practical use — otherwise they were relegated to insignificance.¹²

The *Haskalah* was the Jewish counterpart of the attempts of the Renaissance and European Enlightenment to limit the domination of life by religion, to put an end to religious coercion, to assign to religion a limited area of life so that a new secular, humanistic culture and life-style could emerge. The Enlightenment was no longer interested in the conflicts and arguments of the religious groupings which considered themselves orthodox.

It wished to dissolve the myths that had sanctioned arbitrariness and pretentiousness. It wished to do away with the beliefs in the gods of the competing absolutes . . . and with belief in supernatural interventions in human affairs The desire for autonomy is the nerve of the myth of the Enlightenment; and its guide is reason, not calculating, utilitarian reason, but substantial reason — in the human mind and in the cosmos.¹³

The ideal of the *Haskalah*, an ideal which it shared with the European Enlightenment, was the confinement of religion to its own sphere. It saw cultural creativity as essentially autonomous and sought to make room in Jewish life for non-religious values as no less significant than religious values.¹⁴ The *Haskalah* opposed the idea that all spiritual activity was a function of religion and had to be subjugated to religion. "The maskilim advocated the study of arts and sciences, native languages, practical trades and the development of Hebrew poetry and prose. They opposed the forcing of all culture and life into the four ells of *halakha* or Torah."¹⁵ The significance of the *Haskalah* lay not simply in its advocating the pursuit of the secular arts and sciences in Jewish life but in its conferring upon such pursuits a significance equal to that of the pursuit of Torah.

Let us now return to Kaplan's definition of Judaism as a civilization. We have become accustomed to view it as primarily an attempt to correct

11. Cf. David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York, 1987), p.

16 and Kaplan, *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, p. 197.

12. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Golah ve-Nekhar* (Tel Aviv, 1954), vol. I, p. 495f.

13. James L. Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers* (Boston, 1986), p. 115.

14. Kaufmann, *Op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 27.

15. *Ibid.*

the Reform, Orthodox and Conservative reductions of Judaism to a creedal, legislative or historical religion. It would be more correct, however, to see it as an attempt to counter the traditionalist assumption that all of Judaism must be subsumed under the concept of religion or Torah and that Torah, in that sense, is the only worthy form of Jewish interest. "Paradoxical as it may sound," writes Kaplan, "the spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people demands that religion cease to be its sole preoccupation."¹⁶

Mordecai Kaplan's thought represents a highly significant contemporary attempt to deal with the modern redefinition of Torah or Judaism which began with Moses Mendelssohn and other subsequent leaders of the *Haskalah*. Mendelssohn had made a distinction between the truths of religion which were universally acknowledged and the divine legislation which had been revealed exclusively to the Jewish people. Naftali Hertz Wesseley spoke of knowledge of the "Torah of Man," or human culture, which must precede knowledge of religion or the "Torah of God." Peretz Smolenskin redefined Torah as a national culture which could always be adjusted to new historical conditions. Aḥad Ha'am spoke of *Torah shebalev* or the Torah of the heart as the modern cultural creativity of the Jewish people that gives expression to its national spirit. In these, and other similar attempts, Judaism is redefined as permitting the emergence of spheres of culture and life which are no longer dominated by religion and which permit the emergence of a Jewish culture open to outside influences while at the same time expressing and encouraging Jewish identity and continuity.

The traditional Jewish way of life, (writes Kaplan), was predicated on the self-segregated and isolationist status of the Jewish community. That status has become absolutely untenable in the modern world which demands free intercourse and exchange of ideas and experiences, as indispensable to intellectual and moral growth as well as to the general peace.¹⁷

For Kaplan, the cultural implication of Jewish peoplehood in relation to the non-Jewish world involves

the appropriation and integration into Jewish culture of values found in other cultures that are compatible with Judaism, and the translation and interpretation of Jewish cultural creations as a contribution to other cultures.¹⁸

For him, it is not separatism, but otherness, which must become the principle of Jewish life.

Separatism is the antithesis of cooperation and results in an ingrown and clannish remoteness which leads to cultural and spiritual stagnation. Otherness thrives best when accompanied by active cooperation and interaction

16. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York, 1934, p. 345.

17. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (New York, 1958), p. 208.

18. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers* (New York, 1956), p. 33.

with neighboring cultures and civilizations, and achieves an individuality which is of universal significance.¹⁹

In Mordecai Kaplan's thought religion is viewed as "the integrating and soul-giving factor"²⁰ of a civilization and the term Torah is expanded to embrace "whatever knowledge would enable us Jews to retain our individuality as a people, discern our true destiny, and know the means and methods of achieving it."²¹ To broaden the concept of Torah it is necessary to realize that Jews have no monopoly on the wisdom of life. On the contrary,

The wisdom which we should display as synonymous with Torah should consist in our learning from the wisdom of all peoples, both ancient and modern acquired by them in the course of their striving for the fulfillment of human destiny.²²

Kant saw Enlightenment as

the liberation of man from his self-caused state of minority. Minority is the incapacity of using one's understanding without the direction of another. The state of minority is self-caused when its source lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of determination and courage to use it without the assistance of another. *Sapere aude*. Dare to use your own understanding! is then the motto of Enlightenment.²³

This statement may be viewed as the quintessential expression and definition of both the Enlightenment and the *Haskalah*.

In his simultaneous espousal of tradition and repudiation of its dogmatism and intolerance, Mordecai Kaplan's writings constitute a twentieth century restatement of the best in the Enlightenment and the *Haskalah*. To him, a man without a tradition is in a far worse situation than a man without a country.

For a man without a country is a man without a present, from the standpoint of citizenship, while a man without a tradition is a man without a past, without a future, and without a present, from the standpoint of being fully human.²⁴ (On the other hand, he writes,) if tradition is to be a means toward our growing up, it has to be partly outgrown . . . We should feel toward our tradition as we should feel toward our country: My tradition right or wrong: if right, to be kept right; if wrong, to be set right . . . It is necessary to be rooted in a tradition in order to have not only something to live by, but also something to rebel against . . .²⁵ To possess inner freedom, the human mind must be able to rouse itself from . . . inertia, to challenge or question the inherent value of any purpose, ideal, belief or standard which we are asked to accept merely because it has back of it the prestige of a long tradition or the weight of numbers.²⁶

19. *Judaism as a Civilization*, p. 515.

20. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York, 1948), p. 36.

21. *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, p. 383.

22. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *A New Zionism* (New York, 1959), p. 156.

23. Quoted in Frank E. Manuel, *The Changing of the Gods* (Hanover, 1983), p. viii.

24. *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, p. 207.

25. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Not So Random Thoughts* (New York, 1966), pp. 274-76.

26. *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 289.

Contrary to the popular impression, the Enlightenment brought about a renewed interest in religion and effected a revival of religious thought.

Dissent was thriving in the new, less hierarchical society; religion gained a new and deepening meaning in various strata of society, from philosophical deism and Rousseau's *religion de Genève* to the popular revival movements of Pietism and Methodism.²⁷

Kant's approach to religion was based on a faith in God derived from the moral element in human nature and freed of the belief in supernatural revelation. The poet Byron spoke of conscience as the oracle of God. For Mordecai Kaplan, God's reality should actually be experienced through conscience, which is the human functioning of the ontological law of polarity, or independence and interdependence. Conscience operates in individuals and groups as moral responsibility for the effects of our thoughts, feelings and actions on others.²⁸

In Jewish life, the *maskilim* were the pioneers of new religious outlooks and theologies. The *maskilim*, like their non-Jewish predecessors, sought to disentangle religion from the excrescences of superstition and credulity. They sought a distilled, purified, religion in which the essence of the Jewish faith would be more clearly visible. They spoke of *hamaor sheba-Torah* (the light of the Torah) and *emunah zerufah* (a purified faith). Of the philosophy of Nachman Krochmal, the father of the *Haskalah* in Galicia, Kaplan writes that

it points the way to a conception of God that is the product of progressive human experience and knowledge as the basis of Jewish religion. It thereby frees Jewish religion from commitment to the doctrine of the supernatural origin of the Torah . . . it shifts the center of Judaism from dogmas and rituals to the will-to-live of the Jewish People . . . it frankly recognizes not only the legitimacy, but also the necessity, of studying the tradition in the light of so much historical context as it is possible to discover and reconstruct. This does away at one stroke with the oracular approach to the tradition, particularly the Bible . . . Krochmal's historical approach, on the other hand, establishes a rational basis for the modern historical study of the Bible, as well as of the post-Biblical writings.²⁹

It was as a result of the Enlightenment that the use of the term "Providence" as a kind of personal noun became widespread. Such usage conveyed the conception of a God whose whole concern was to care for the happiness of humanity. The providential care of mankind was no longer merely one of God's many activities, it now became his primary function, his *raison d'être*. God was now

that which so governs the total scheme of things as to ensure that it will serve men's — which are also God's — interests. And God's objective is not, pri-

27. Pape, *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

28. Cf. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Evolution of the Idea of God," *The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Volume of the Jewish Quarterly Review*, ed. Abraham A. Neuman and Solomon Zeitlin (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 345.

29. *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, p. 204.

marily, to redeem men, to forgive them, or to mete out justice to them but to secure their final felicity, their ultimate perfection.³⁰

Nachman Krochmal's concept of God as the element of purpose in a people's culture is an elaboration of this view. Kaplan's concept of God as the Power that makes for salvation is thus directly related to the religion of the Enlightenment and the *Haskalah* as well as to the later concepts of Matthew Arnold, William James, John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead and Henry Nelson Wieman.

The *maskilim* enthusiastically reiterated the Enlightenment faith in humanity, but also utilized that faith to encourage faith in the capacity of the Jewish people to transform itself into a modern people with a modern culture in which formal religion was no longer all-pervasive. It is easy to criticize the faith of the Enlightenment in progress and human perfectibility as being naive and simplistic. Yet, such criticism is too facile for an age with a historical sense. "We should know that except for the gloomiest prophets, men in the past almost always look shortsighted, and their foresight may be overlooked because it has become part of our common sense."³¹ The optimism of the enlightenment was, essentially, the belief that superstition, bigotry and tyranny could be weakened and human life thus improved.

The men of the Enlightenment believed that groups, like individuals, had a quintessential spirit, a definable character or essence which could be discovered, identified and defined in simple terms. It was believed to pervade every aspect of national and religious life and be immune to the ravages of time. In harmony with this presupposition, books on the esprit of various nations multiplied.

In the twentieth century, the working out of the esprit of a religion or culture might become rather sophisticated in the hands of an anthropologist or a sociologist, but the fundamental conception has not changed much since the Enlightenment.³²

The *maskilim*, too, began a quest for the essence, quintessence, spirit, soul, purpose or meaning of Judaism which has continued unabated to this very day. If Judaism was now more than Torah, if Torah was not all there was to Judaism, what was the unique, particular essence of the Jewish experience? For Mendelssohn, Judaism possessed no special truths but was the bearer of a special ritual law divinely revealed to the Jews alone. Nachman Krochmal asserted that the basis of Judaism is its faith in the primacy of reason or self-awareness. According to him,

the Jewish people is enabled to avert death through its extraordinary power of self-awareness or reason. When the Jewish people reaches the end of one (historical) cycle, it exists for a time in a state of suspended animation. It

30. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York, 1970), p. 210.

31. Muller, *Op. cit.*, 320.

32. Manuel, *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

later revives, however, and resumes its career, this time on a higher level of existence.³³

Peretz Smolenskin saw the essence of Judaism in national feeling, the Hebrew language and the hope for national restoration. For Ahad Ha'am the essence of Judaism was the pursuit of absolute justice. For A.D. Gordon it was the quest for objective truth.

Mordecai M. Kaplan, the outstanding representative of the ideals of the *Haskalah* in the twentieth century, continued this quest for the unique spirit of Judaism. He saw the essence of Judaism in ethical nationhood, or the limitation of absolute sovereignty and the implementation of moral responsibility in the life of individuals and nations. He believed that civilization was in greater danger than ever before, because both the nuclear powers and the smaller nations behave without a sense of moral responsibility in their international affairs.

The very survival of mankind demands the modification of absolute sovereignty in the direction of ethical nationhood. From the very beginning that has been the purpose and meaning of Jewish existence.³⁴

Isaac Baer Levinsohn, the founder of the *Haskalah* movement in Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had taught that "there is no greater sin than that of the man who causes the disappearance of his nation from the world."³⁵ To him, *kivvum ha-umah*, the survival of the Jewish people, was the greatest of all the commandments. In the middle of the twentieth century, Mordecai Kaplan reformulated Levinsohn's thought and expanded it in the following words:

Nothing more tragic can happen than for a people and its civilization to disintegrate and die. To be in any way responsible for this tragedy is to be guilty of snuffing out life in its most human and sacred form . . .³⁶ We act irresponsibly when we do not persuade such groups to give primacy to the task of arousing mankind to the imperative need of putting an end to all international and civil wars.³⁷

Rational religion encompasses a wide variety of approaches to religious truth, from deism and naturalism to rationalistic supernaturalism. In its various forms, it constitutes an outgrowth of the Age of Enlightenment. Such religion fosters faith in the idea that the voice of universal reason and conscience is the voice of God. The attempt to discover universal elements in religion gave rise to types of religion which could come to terms with the new insights and new challenges of the natural and social sciences and philosophy. It is certainly true that

apart from this effort the religion of the West would be unable to elicit in-

33. *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, p. 202.

34. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* (New York, 1970), p. 49.

35. Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Zerubavel* (Warsaw, 1901) Part I, p. 84; quoted in Meyer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature* (New York, 1936), vol. 3, p. 210.

36. *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 83f.

37. *The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence*, p. 319.

tegrating commitment or to find vital points of contact with secularism and with the myths of other religions and cultures The eighteenth century's demand for the universal is the perennially valid intention of its myth of reason.³⁸

Rejection of the goals of the Enlightenment leads to dogmatism and fanaticism.

The major weakness of rational religion has been its inability to foster a sense of intimacy and mystery. This may account for its failure to attract wider support. James L. Adams attributes this one-sidedness to the Enlightenment's preference for the neoclassical mood. It may, indeed, be the result of an over-riding concern with the clear and distinct ideas of reason and a failure to appreciate the depth and richness that only poetry and myth can convey. "Any natural religion that loses contact with the historical and the concrete substitutes ideas *about* religion for piety."³⁹

Mordecai Kaplan's *transnaturalist* interpretation of Judaism espouses the Enlightenment's loyalty to universal reason but tempers it with the intimacy and mystery which only a wholehearted recognition and embracing of the historical, evolutionary, and civilizational perspectives on Judaism make possible. He reminds us that Israel was the first people to discover the God of history. "The actual revelation of God took place not amid the thunder and lightening on Mt. Sinai but in 'the still small voice' of Israel's sense of human history."⁴¹ That accounts for the incomparable impact which the God of Israel has had on the religions of mankind. Nor does Judaism fail to provide an outlet for the mystical leanings of human nature.

The self-identification of the individual Jew with his Jewish people is the source of the mystical element in the Jewish religion . . . Identification with the Jewish people provides Jewish religion with the indispensable dimension of the mystical.⁴⁰

History and community are central categories of Kaplan's *transnaturalist* approach to Judaism.

Jewish identity demands of the individual Jew that he so come to know the Jewish people, its entire history, its civilization, and its destiny as to experience the reality of its God. This God, YHWH, is that aspect of the Jewish people which renders it more than the sum of its individuals, past, present, and future, and gives meaning to all its virtues, sins, successes and failures.⁴²

The vicissitudes of humanity, in general, and of the Jewish people, in particular, in the twentieth century tempered Mordecai Kaplan's faith in the ideology of the Enlightenment and the *Haskalah* but did not shatter it. He attributed to the Enlightenment a new dynamic concept of reality

38. Adams, *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

40. Mordecai M. Kaplan (with Arthur A. Cohen), *If Not Now, When?* (New York, 1973), p. 22.

41. *A New Zionism*, p. 114f.

42. *If Not Now, When?*, p. 68.

and a transvaluation of values. With confidence in human ability to extend the boundaries of knowledge and experience had come faith in reason and progress. Despair was thus replaced by hope. Much had happened since the Enlightenment to dampen the human spirit and cast people into despair again. Anti-rationalism and supernaturalism were on the ascent. The decimation of European Jewry during the Second World War was, for the Jewish people, a particularly painful reminder of the evils which supernaturalist and irrationalist ideologies could engender. Many people continued to be victims of intellectual and spiritual schizophrenia and compartmentalized minds. Nevertheless, Mordecai Kaplan believed that reason and hope would make a comeback. Faith in progress as automatic would be replaced by the realization that progress must be rationally and spiritually willed. People would once again strive to make life in this world significant and worthwhile. That was the kind of future in which he hoped a place would be found for the Jewish people.⁴³

43. Cf. *A New Zionism*, p. 50.

A Yankee's View of Liverpool Jewry

GABRIEL A. SIVAN

JUNE 4TH 1856 — I HAD A MOST AGREEABLE conversation yesterday, at the Royal Institution, with Mr. William Rathbone and some friends of his, on matters of mutual interest and concern. Mr. Rathbone's father is a genial Member of Parliament whose devotion to social reform also characterizes the son; an earlier Rathbone was the first Englishman to import cotton from our American plantations, but members of the same family have distinguished themselves in the past as founders of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. I was able to afford these gentlemen some harmless amusement by recounting a few of my experiences, in the course of the last three years, as American Consul in Liverpool. They were largely ignorant, however, of certain important and historic links between this great port of theirs and New England — another proof, if one is needed, of damnable British insularity. Richard Mather and his descendants, Increase and Cotton Mather, are household names in America, yet I doubt if any of my companions had heard of them. It was, I said, as an incorrigible puritan that the Rev. Richard Mather had been dismissed from his living at Toxteth Chapel, not two miles from where we were seated on Colquitt Street, and had sailed for Massachusetts in 1635, there to become first pastor of Dorchester. Happily, Mr. Rathbone and his friends *were* familiar with the name of Robert Morris, a native of Liverpool, whom all loyal Americans remember as a signatory to the Declaration of Independence and as the new Republic's superintendent of finance. When our conversation touched upon American literature, the opportunity to cite a further eminent example could scarcely be resisted. Mr. Washington Irving's reputation in England is now, of course, assured; but few people are aware that he came to this city in 1815, as his family's business agent, only to be declared bankrupt three years later — "and but for that temporary misfortune," I hastened to point out, "Mr. Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle' and other New England tales might never have come down to us!"

The territorial expansion of the United States, precipitated by the California gold rush and — perhaps also — heralding the development of a railroad system that will simplify rapid transit between our Atlantic and Pacific coasts, has also had the effect of pouring vast wealth into Liverpool. Fine public buildings and other amenities bear witness to the prosperity now enjoyed by the world's greatest entrepot of commerce, a

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stroke of good fortune which has — if anything — been enhanced by the present conflict with Russia. Indeed, I am informed, nearly one-half of Great Britain's trade — and fully twice that of London itself — flows into Liverpool by way of the River Mersey. One cannot, however, ignore the fact that it is the merchant class which proves the chief beneficiary. Those thousands of immigrants who have been drawn hither as by a magnet, latterly from starving Ireland, often endure conditions of life that practically defy description and that no civilized country should tolerate. The kind of squalor I observed in the vicinity of Scotland Road, within a month of my arrival here, could not be reproduced in the worst and most neglected part of any American city; and if, as I tend to believe, environment has a direct effect on the individual, there will be an eruption of vice, criminality and disease here that nothing will hold in check.

It must be said, to their credit, that the gentlemen whom I met at the Royal Institution were greatly agitated by these critical observations of mine. Mr. Rathbone, who spoke first, referred to a number of civic leaders — notably the late William Roscoe, a much-admired writer, Member of Parliament, social reformer and patron of the arts — who had initiated various measures to remedy the situation. Liverpool's Corporation has already a School for the Blind, established in 1791, as well as a Medical Officer of Health and a Children's Hospital — "the first of their kind anywhere in the kingdom, if not in the world." Public sanitation and housing are now, he assures me, under urgent development. While relieved to hear of such measures, I indicated that their effects have yet to become visible on a wide scale and that the port has need of a forceful advocate such as Mr. Disraeli, whom I look forward to hearing very soon in the House of Commons. One of Rathbone's friends, a Mr. Charles Mozley, then affirmed that such a champion might be found in Mr. Gladstone — a Liverpool-born former Conservative (now a Liberal) whom many expect to attain high office before long.

Yesterday's exchange of views proved useful and instructive; it undoubtedly corrected some misapprehensions on both sides. Mr. Mozley, I gather, is one of the principal Jewish merchants of this city. Having met no Jews in Salem and only a few even in Boston, I can admit neither to much knowledge nor to feelings of prejudice where they are concerned. For that reason, and for the sake of politeness, I shall make a point of seeing Mr. Mozley once again, as he has been kind enough to suggest, at some convenient time next week.

June 10th — At the Athenaeum Club, this morning, I spent an hour or more with Mr. Charles Mozley — a shrewd, but good-humored gentleman — and two of his coreligionists who also occupy respected positions in society. Mr. Barnard Joseph, whose robust health provides a striking contrast with the unwholesomeness of many to be encountered hereabouts, is likewise a merchant. From some initial exchange of pleasantries between them, I was able to surmise — correctly, as it transpired — that

he and Mozley are at odds regarding the internal affairs of the Liverpool Jews. This matter was speedily elucidated by Mr. Mozley's other companion, the Rev. David Isaacs, a most cultivated and learned individual, whose ecclesiastical rank here must be akin to that of a bishop in the Episcopal Church of England. Having been elected to the chair of Hebrew at Queen's College, he is generally accorded the title of Professor Isaacs; on which account, I felt bound to remark that there are as yet, in America, very few *professing* Jews. The introductions once concluded, tea and coffee were then served by liveried flunkys. I had my customary glass of whiskey, and Dr. Isaacs accepted my offer of a cigar.

Within the first few minutes of our conversation, it became apparent that these three gentlemen were not unfamiliar with American life in general and with American Israel in particular. When I indicated my desire to learn something of their history and religious organization in Liverpool, Mr. Mozley observed that a Jewish congregation was established here a century ago — "at much the same time as Philadelphia's, long after New York but years before the first synagogue in Boston." From rented premises close to the harbor there had been a move to the permanent and (I was assured) elegant synagogue located on Seel Street, in 1808, where a Mr. Tobias Goodman is said to have preached the first English sermons delivered by any Jew in the kingdom. Mr. Joseph then hastened to inform me that there were now two houses of worship for Jews in the city, resulting from a secession that had taken place less than twenty years ago "over matters of democratic representation and procedure." He had evidently been the chief instigator; and, somewhat to Mr. Mozley's embarrassment, Dr. Isaacs went on to explain the reasons motivating his own departure from what is now styled the "Old" Hebrew Congregation, as recently as 1849. A dispute over religious ritual in the parent synagogue had provoked his transfer of allegiance, as preacher, to the rival establishment at Pilgrim Street — "where more conservative ideas prevail." Notwithstanding various attempts to reconcile their differences, the congregations were now pursuing their separate ways; and since the Jewish population is inferior only to that of the capital, their existing facilities for worship must ere long prove inadequate.

I am given to understand that, for centuries past, two distinct groups have flourished within Jewry: the "Sephardim" who are of Spanish or Portuguese descent, were the first of their nation to settle in England and America, and continue to pride themselves on a supposed aristocratic pedigree; and the more numerous "Ashkenazim" or German Jews, those hailing from central and eastern Europe. Each having fostered its own cultural life, jargon, mode of prayer and dietary preferences, there is but little intercourse between them; more especially as the former maintain a jealous exclusivity. The Jews whose acquaintance I have made here are all of German or Polish ancestry, whereas the "hidalgos" cut a prominent figure in London, Amsterdam and New York. Dr. Isaacs was somewhat

chagrined to discover my ignorance concerning a minor London authoress, one Grace Aguilar, who died young a few years since. Her best novel, he assured me, was "The Vale of Cedars," a romance about Jews in Spain at the height of the notorious Inquisition. Among her lesser works he had come across "The Perez Family," a tale set in Liverpool; apart from one "Ashkenazi" ne'er-do-well, all of the Jews mentioned bore Spanish and Portuguese names — thereby suggesting an Iberian origin for the city's Hebrew congregation. Dr. Isaacs thought the whole idea preposterous, and even doubted if Miss Aguilar had ever visited the port. Mr. Mozley confirmed that their old congregational rulebook was written in the Judaeo-German or "Yiddish" dialect. It contained, *inter alia*, the intriguing regulation that no member be summoned to the Reading of the Holy Law, should he be seen wearing a colored neckerchief or chewing tobacco!

Here is a notable instance of Jews readily acclimatized to their English environment, yet complete emancipation is still denied them in Great Britain. Baron Lionel de Rothschild, having conscientiously refused to take the prescribed oath "on the true faith of a Christian," may not assume his rightful seat in the Commons as a Liberal Member of Parliament; whereas Mr. Disraeli, a Jew by birth but an Anglican by religion, has served his country as Chancellor of the Exchequer. This objectionable and outmoded form of discrimination — unthinkable in our American democracy — reflects no credit on the "enlightened" English. My interlocutors were delighted to hear me say so, and their interest was particularly aroused when I mentioned the name of Mr. Mordecai Manuel Noah, whose reputation as a dramatist and publisher of American newspapers transcends the boundaries of the United States. It was, I said, that same Robert Morris — the American statesman referred to earlier in our conversation as an emigrant from Liverpool — who had promoted Mr. Noah's first steps in the public service; and when the latter became High Sheriff of New York, in 1822, no such office could have been attained by the most prominent Jew in England. Though not disposed to argue the point, Dr. Isaacs affirmed that "progressive Christian opinion" here is overwhelmingly in favor of political emancipation. Mr. Joseph drew my attention to the fact that, in 1830, a petition urging the removal of Jewish political disabilities had been signed by the Mayor and 20,000 citizens of Liverpool. A year ago, furthermore, the City of London elected a Jew, Mr. David Salomons, to serve as Lord Mayor. It thus remained only for the "parliamentary hurdle" to be overcome, and that is likely to take no more than another two or three years . . .

All this talk of political emancipation led me to ask whether such trends were having any effect on the Jewish religion. Had there been calls for its modernization and reform, and might this not ultimately result in the type of fragmentation that had riven Christendom? I detected a faint smile on the countenance of Dr. Isaacs, when he admitted that some of

his coreligionists in Germany and America — “deluded by the civic rights and social advancement they have latterly achieved” — are now bent on “reforming” their prayer book and hallowed ritual. In London and Manchester, other “Karaites” had decided to follow their example; but the Jews of England, “with their innate conservatism and suspicion of religious innovation,” would undoubtedly hold fast to the traditional ways. Mr. Mozley hastened to observe that the religious authority wielded by England’s Chief Rabbi, Dr. Adler, is acknowledged not only throughout the British Empire but by a goodly number of American Jews as well. I am inclined to believe that Dr. Isaacs has made an accurate prediction regarding the future of Judaism in England; whether American Jews, however “conservative” their outlook may be, will continue to recognize some foreign authority — that, surely, is questionable.

Despite outward appearances, not a few of the Jews here are poor immigrants who must look to their more affluent brethren for regular aid in cash or kind. Leading members of the two Hebrew congregations, accordingly, devote many hours of the week to philanthropic endeavor, so that needy Jews may not become a burden on the general community. As Mr. Mozley phrased it, “we take care of our own.” This concern for social welfare also extends to humanity at large and the common man. It seems that a Mr. David Lewis, the son of a London Jewish merchant, who arrived here as a youth in 1839 to serve his apprenticeship with a tailoring firm, has just recently opened a men’s and boys’ clothing store on Ranelagh Street. This would not be anything remarkable, Jews having long figured as tailors and old-clothes-men, but for the fact that Mr. Lewis wishes to make his store function in a new way and intends revolutionizing his chosen trade. By improving the quality and design of goods manufactured in his own workshop, he proposes to bring inexpensive and durable clothing within the reach of the masses. I shall make further enquiries about this scheme; if successful, he will not only be a public benefactor but also one deserving emulation in other parts of the civilized world.

The remaining few minutes of our conversation at the Athenaeum were devoted to foreign affairs. I could not resist the impulse to poke fun at Great Britain’s strange alliance with benighted Turkey in the Crimean War. Dr. Isaacs, however, vehemently defended the present campaign and heaped scorn on the late Czar Nicholas — “a heartless tyrant and a new Haman.” Were the evils I had seen here to be multiplied a hundred-fold, he said, they would still pale in comparison with the “hellish degradation” to which Jews and other dissenters have been subjected in the Russian Empire. Much the same kind of sentiment was expressed by his companions, who also referred to conditions in Greece, Morocco and the Papal States. They suggested that I visit a Mr. Julius Hyams, an emigrant from Russian Poland now in business on Park Lane; he apparently came to Liverpool a year or so ago, bringing a graphic and horrifying account

of Czarist repression. "His English leaves something to be desired," Mr. Joseph told me, "yet it will suffice to portray the miseries inflicted upon the Russian or Polish Israelite and the bestiality of his devoutly Christian persecutors." Such profound fellow-feeling was impressive to behold, and is greatly to the credit of these gentlemen. If he is as persuasive a preacher as a speaker in private conversation, Dr. Isaacs must be one of the foremost humanitarians in England. I rather like him, but would quail under the lash of his tongue. As for myself, it seems that I should revise some of my notions on foreign policy. The representative of America in this port now has a good deal of work to do.

July 23d — There was an unforeseen outcome of my confabulation several weeks ago, shortly before our last trip to London, with three prominent Liverpool Jews. Mr. Barnard Joseph sent a message delivered at the Consulate, graciously inviting me to attend the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the New Hebrew Congregation's permanent synagogue, to be erected at Hope Place. The exercises took place yesterday, early in the afternoon, and soon after twelve o'clock I drove to the appointed spot. Having recalled the mention of another and older house of prayer which the Jews maintain on Seel Street, I paused *en route* to view that structure — quite a fine one of elegant design, though modest proportions — where the parent body, forsaken by its rebellious offspring and, hence, styled the Old Hebrew Congregation, now gathers for daily worship just a stone's throw from the Royal Institution. We then drove past St. Luke's Church to our destination on Pilgrim Street. This is a narrow thoroughfare, located on a hillside where the Philharmonic Hall, the Mechanics' Institute, the homes of leading merchants and sundry other edifices overlook the harbor. For reasons best known to themselves, townsfolk have dubbed the neighborhood "Mount Zion."

Providentially, the weather turned out to be warm and sunny, which is a rare event hereabouts in July. Several hundred persons were assembled outside the temporary place of worship when I arrived there. A seat having been reserved for my use within, I briefly surveyed the concourse prior to entering the crowded synagogue and attending a Jewish service for the first time in my career. Afternoon prayers were scheduled to commence at half past the hour of midday. Although the more affluent could readily be distinguished from their impecunious brethren, everyone seemed well-dressed and in a buoyant holiday mood. Never before have I witnessed so extensive a gathering of Jewish people. Figures plump and slender, tall and short, plain and more rarely handsome could be discerned at a moment's glance; but there was virtually none of that dowdy or coarse appearance, still less of that elephantine grotesqueness, which so disfigures members of English society. Perhaps it is a question of diet or physical exercise. An enclosure had been set up around the foundations of the new structure, and a tent erected there to accommodate ladies and protect them from the unwonted sunshine. Flags and streamers decked

the entire enclosure, producing a colorful effect, and the display of many a Union Jack served to remind those in attendance that John Bull is now sinking his teeth into the Russian Bear.

Having been ushered to my seat in the main body of the synagogue, I was in time for some melodious Hebrew chorales and for a prayer, recited in English, invoking the Divine blessing on Queen Victoria, her consort and family. Next, Dr. Isaacs ascended the pulpit and delivered his sermon. The text he had chosen, from Isaiah, was singularly appropriate — "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion . . . a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation." The preacher's carefully phrased and eloquent address was, if anything, enhanced by the sobriety of his rabbinical attire. Dr. Isaacs, fellow members of the Jewish clergy, Mr. Barnard Joseph, the wardens and other gentlemen thereafter walked in solemn procession to Hope Place, close by, where the concluding ceremonies were performed.

According to this morning's "Liverpool Mercury," the weather was fine, the ceremony brilliant and preacher's message "deeply impressive." A banquet, in celebration of the day's events, was held last evening at the Angel Hotel in Dale Street. Regrettably, my presence was required elsewhere.

* * *

These diarized entries cannot, of course, be found anywhere in the *English Notebooks* of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who served for a period of four years (1853-57) as U.S. Consul in Liverpool. The historical data are accurate, however, and all of the persons mentioned could have been encountered at the times and places specified. In creating the background, I was mindful of the exhibition entitled "Liverpool Jewry — A Pictorial History," which the sponsors invited me to open, at the Manchester Jewish Museum, on June 14, 1987. Approximately 240 years of communal life on Merseyside are encompassed by this exhibit, and a kind of halfway mark, therefore, guides the choice of date (1856) for Hawthorne's "notes."

"The Perez Family," a highly imaginative tale by Grace Aguilar, first appeared in *Home Scenes and Heart Studies* (London, 1843). The book went through no less than 16 editions during the next 40 years, but is now little read.

David Myer Isaacs (1810-1879), the New Hebrew Congregation's scholarly preacher, remained at Hope Place until 1862, when he moved to the Great Synagogue in Manchester. Of Barnard Lyon Joseph few other details are available after 1856. Charles Mozley became the first Jew to serve as Mayor of Liverpool (1863-64); by that time, political emancipation having been achieved in 1858, both Lionel de Rothschild and David Salomons had taken their seats in the House of Commons.

Mosley's remark, concerning the dependence of some American (Ashkenazi) congregations on the authority of Britain's Chief Rabbinate,

is deliberately exaggerated. There had been some correspondence with the Great Synagogue in London, mainly over halakhic ("ritual") questions, but these contacts seem to have ended with the death of Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschel in 1842. For fuller details, see: Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in New York* (Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York, 1930), pp. 75-77 and 326ff.

David Lewis (1823-1885), who went on to become senior treasurer of the Liverpool Old Hebrew Congregation, is remembered for his many benefactions, Jewish and general alike. Something of a showman, he was an early pioneer of the department store, anticipating Marks & Spencer through the establishment of his Lewis's chain in many British cities. The story is told in *Friends of the People* (London, 1956), a centenary volume by Asa Briggs.

Julius Hyams (1825-1898), the head of an outfitting business, came from the small Polish town of Dobrzyn on the Vistula and was one of the first East European Jews to reach Liverpool. The present writer is his great-great-great-great-nephew.

Until the second decade of the 20th century, Liverpool remained the major port of embarkation for immigrants sailing to the New World, Australia and South Africa. Vast numbers of Jewish refugees, mainly bound for America, joined this stream from 1881; some, nervous about crossing the ocean, stayed in Liverpool and inflated the local *kehillah's* population to a maximum of 11,000 in 1914. Since the devastation caused by Nazi bombing in World War II, which led to a massive economic recession, and as a result of emigration, *aliyah* and a declining birthrate, the number of Jews on Merseyside has plunged to 5,000. This community has, nevertheless, given birth to a host of prominent jurists and politicians, rabbis and scholars, writers, musicians and entertainers. It has also provided Israel with hundreds of *olim*, among them the late Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isser Yehudah Unterman.

God as Promise of Existence

MEIR BEN-HORIN

*Ich habe mich stets befleissigt, nicht nach Gold
aber nach Gott zu graben; manchmal stiess ich
auf Himmel. Ich habe nach dem Ewigen ge-
graben, nicht aus verwegener Überhebung,
aber aus religiöser Abenteuerlust.*

Else Lasker-Schüler, "Meine Andacht" *

NO CONCEPTION OF GOD IS WITHOUT DIFFICULTIES. It seems that the term and the complications grow together and the evolution of human culture bears the marks of the transformations that they have undergone together. In William James' words,

Nothing is more striking than the secular alternation that goes on in the moral and religious tone of men, as their insight into nature and their social arrangements progressively develop. After an interval of a few generations the mental climate proves unfavorable to notions of the deity which at an earlier date were perfectly satisfactory: the older gods have fallen below the common secular level, and can no longer be believed in. Today a deity who should require bleeding sacrifices to placate him would be too sanguinary to be taken seriously.¹

When "the fruits" began to appear worthless or conflicted with "indispensable human ideals" or seemed "childish, contemptible, or immortal," the god(s) were dropped.

It was in this way that the Greek and Roman gods ceased to be believed in by educated pagans; it is thus that we ourselves judge of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Mohammedan theologies; Protestants have so dealt with the Catholic notions of deity, and liberal Protestants with older Protestant notions; it is thus that Chinamen judge of us, and that all of us now living will be judged by our descendants. When we cease to admire or approve what the definition of a deity implies, we end up deeming that deity incredible.²

To the ensuing evolving there is no end, except the end of human experiencing itself. Man and the effort to assign meaning to "God" —

* (I have always been assiduous to dig, not for gold, but for God: on occasion I chanced upon Heaven. I dug to find the Eternal, not out of daring insolence, but out of religious adventure-lust.) In *Dichtungen und Dokumente* (Munich: Kozel, n.d.), p. 300.

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 328.

2. Ibid.

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points to the God-man struggle as a crucial element in the human condition.

Waystations of this struggle are the conceptions of God as person, as power, as process, as mystery. The term, "waystations," with its implication of ongoing movement, progress, and reconstruction, is not introduced inadvertently. Into the most stable or "ultimate" of notions it injects a measure of tentativeness, variety, and waiting. But it does not carry the connotation of conflict. For religion, God-struggle, God-search, God-doubt need not necessarily sound the call to battle stations. On the frontiers of religious thought and imagination, religion fully lives.

I

The idea of God as acting person, as functioning power, is both liberating and oppressive. Perhaps the majority of the human race hold on to this identification and do so "with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might." They worship as God the power-person greater than themselves, greater than which cannot be conceived. Although fundamentally they take God-power to be good-power, they are more likely than not to acknowledge that what "good" means to God is not necessarily what "good" means to themselves. They are, in fact, led to believe that since God is essentially incomprehensible — except for the association of His being with overwhelming or absolute power/personality/mystery — His goodness is equally incomprehensible. God-power is taken to be limitless, outside of the totality of conditions that constitutes the space-time continuum of nature or universe or "creation." In a word, it is "spiritual." And so is God-goodness. Incomprehensibility makes for unconditional goodness, morality, holiness. A correspondent told James that the chief cause of "all sickness, weakness, or depression is the *human sense of separateness* from that Divine Energy which we call God." The lady was sure that the person "who feels hourly, momentarily, the influx of the Deific Breath" cannot be attacked by disease.³ In a passage, quoted by James,⁴ from Ralph Waldo Trine's *In Tune with the Infinite* (1899) God is "Infinite Spirit," "Infinite Life," "Infinite Intelligence and Power." Trine wrote: "To recognize our own divinity, and our intimate relation to the Universal, is to attach the belts of our machinery to the powerhouse of the Universe." Other terms are "Inexhaustible Fountain,"⁵ "Ideal Power,"⁶ "Spirit of Infinite Peace,"⁷ "the Comforter."⁸

The point is that the historical, political, or interpersonal consequences of the identification of God with supreme power have often been

3. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 515 n.

promotive of human good. But the linkage has also been destructive. Lord Acton saw that if all power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. This suggests that, far from being the All-good, the All-powerful is the source of all corruption. The association of God with power, when driven all the way to the magnitude of the absolute, converts the divine into the demonic and religion into idolatry, the service of the all-corrupting absolute. The truth is that not power but the absolute, is corruptive "the Absolute corrupts all power."⁹

It must be conceded, however, that under less ambitious auspices, although always in danger of absolutization and, hence, of escape from responsibility and accountability, the correlation or identification of God and power may free its adherents from subservience to the human tyrant or enslaver: "For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the Lord their God" (Lev 25:55). God here is not power in general or in the absolute but power greater than some men and functioning on behalf of all men, power greater than the power of Egypt and entering history as liberation from all manner of servitude. Fundamentally, for the collective consciousness of Israel, God as power is God as liberation power from all manner of "Egypt." Jewish monotheism is the faith that redemption power greater than ourselves is active in reality and in history. It alone is God and good. Even its ordained servants are *primi inter pares*. Their share in the image of God does not exceed that of the non-ordained. When, as is proclaimed every day, in the synagogue, in the end "YHWH will be one and His name one" (Zach 14:9), the divine image will be equally manifest in the full individual indentity of all human beings and chosenness will be the synonym of God's unconditional, universal love.

Nonetheless, power presents a high obstacle for many a modern man. Whether corruption-power or redemption-power, the power-action component no longer impels people to bow their heads or bend their knees. Power or concentrated energy invites neither ecstasy nor humility nor meek surrender. On the chemical-physical side, it is a matter for science — to be harnessed and controlled. Social power has to do with authority, the people's power, the power of men and women to make intelligent decisions at important turning points in their lives, in the lives of their communities. Power still generates admiration, respect, caution. But adoration, reverence or worship no longer seem to be relevant to power, no matter how vast, wise or mysterious. Where intelligence is allowed to enter, mystery, we may note, whether in outer or inner space, has lost much of its capacity to induce large-scale genuflection or self-prostrations. Power is either a matter for scientific inquiry or for artistic

9. Meir Ben-Horin, "Toward the Dawn of History," in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought* — Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron, ed. by Joseph L. Blau et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 48.

response. There is no general will before which to stand in awe or in fear and trembling.

A dramatic example for the change in attitude is furnished by the famed *U-netanneh Toqef Qedushshat ha-Yom* (We acclaim this day's pure sanctity, its awesome power). Chanted on Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur at one of the high points of the service, it used to send shivers down the spines of the pious congregants. The imagery of the King and Master of Nature reviewing the performance of everything that lives and determining "who shall live and who shall die, . . . who shall perish by fire and who by water, . . . who by strangling and who by stoning" was, indeed, a signal for the worshippers to seek shelter under the wings of the Almighty. I recall that in our synagogue in the Free City of Danzing, now Gdansk, Jews would cover their heads with their large *Tallithot*, bow deep down from the waist, and cry bitterly while reciting these soul-shaking lines, repenting with broken hearts, fearing the divine judgment which is written and sealed on those very days when "even angels are alarmed, seized with fear and trembling."

But, now, the memory of the Holocaust enters and engenders amazement, even revulsion, rather than contrition. If Heaven assigns "everything that lives" to life and to death, Heaven assigned Jews to this death camp and to that, to this gas chamber and to that crematorium. The Judge is responsible for what Israel had to undergo at the hands of the Nazis. In the Days of Awe He handed down His horrible decree of mass extermination. Israel's body, as Nelly Sachs saw, went up in smoke, was buried in the clouds.

I fear that the thought of such rendering of judgment and execution of justice is today beyond our capacity to relive fantasy year after year, or to tolerate its wild imagery. *U-netanneh Toqef* is becoming another victim of the *Sho'ah*. Nothing of the kind can be taken seriously by those to whom their sanity is precious, who hold on to God-power and God-goodness, to "Our Father" who can be so cruel.

Nor does the concluding, climactic proclamation of *U-netanneh Toqef* retain validity and relevance after the *Sho'ah*. "But penitence, prayer, and good deeds can annul the severity of the decree," the prayer reassures the congregation whose enormous tension is released by these three remedies.

Alas, the reassurance falls flat. The Holocaust struck indiscriminately those who offered penitence, who sent aloft prayers, who performed good deeds: all went to their horrible deaths, enwrapped in their Jewish innocence, in the terribly democratic equality of Jewish holiness. Penitence, prayers, good deeds, along with the entire conception of *U-netanneh Toqef*, fell victim to the Holocaust. The very deity *qua* acting Person and ubiquitous all-mighty Power succumbed to the Zyklon B and the fire and the self-dug graves.

The contrary has been affirmed, of course, by leading Jewish think-

ers. Confessions of faithful adherence to the *U-netanneh Toqef* idea have been formulated in language of unshakable religious loyalty and unwavering spiritual love of Judaism and the Jewish people.

A very recent example is Rabbi Robert Gordis' chapter entitled, "A Cruel God or None: The Challenge of the Holocaust," in *Judaic Ethics For a Lawless World* (1986). Five biblical ideas challenge and possibly silence the terrible cries of the *Sho'ah*: (1) the glory of life and the goodness of God — the world's evil cannot blot out the glory of life; (2) man's right and duty to confront evil in the world; (3) the core of mystery in evil: "Even when it is veiled from men," the moral order has a pattern and meaning, for both the natural and the moral order are created by God; (4) man's freedom: no man is subject to complete determinism; (5) the interdependence of mankind: the messianic age will not come without pain and destruction, yet hope is basic; many will not feel compelled "to choose between a cruel God or none."¹⁰

But the enormity of the Holocaust overwhelms the challenge. The *Sho'ah* was not prevented. That the messianic age will come with pain and destruction leaves the survivors of Treblinka and Maidanek without consolation. The victims' ashes derive no hope, no matter how "basic," from the idea that pain and destruction are the precursors of the messiah. Nor is the real choice between a cruel God and no God. The true choice is between the no longer defensible person-power-process-and-mystery God and the God-conception that is purified of these notions.

Gordis' statement of faith in his earlier chapter in the same volume entitled "Can Religion or Science Serve?" bears on this point. He writes:

I believe in the possibility and the reality of God's communication with mankind. What is more, I am convinced that belief in the doctrine of revelation, properly understood, is intellectually more credible than its denial. . . . For the Jew, an event of transcendental importance took place on Mount Sinai, a prime act of communication between God and man, the Decalogue being the product of that meeting. . . . The Divine-human encounter is operative even in the present.¹¹

But — the Holocaust is not just "more credible than its denial." The Holocaust is a tremendous, *the* tremendous fact of human history, of the human-human encounter in Europe between 1933 and 1945. And it is the Holocaust which struck down the idea that "the Divine-human encounter is operative even in the present" and that "revelation," in Gordis' words, "is a two-way communication, with both God and man playing active roles."

When one visits Mauthausen and Dachau, for example, and permits oneself to *hear* the cries, to *feel* the blood running over one's own skin, the factitiousness of the "two-way communications," or any kind of com-

10. Robert Gordis, *Judaic Ethics For a Lawless World* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1986), p. 93.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 38 ff.

munication, or any kind of revelation of the power-person-mystery deity, past or present, engulfs the mind. This belief syndrome may be recited again and again with the deepest and most sincere conviction of its truth and defended with one's life. But events in the death camps place it outside human credulity, human craving for cosmic support, human hope for salvation. The syndrome now stands beside the "high places" on the map of man's idolatrous aberrations, the unsuccessful search for God.

The power-God is fading into the past. I agree with Andrew M. Greeley that the sacred is still a relevant dimension of human life.

Modern man, (he says), like his archaic predecessor, needs faith, community, myth, ethics which reflect the nature of reality, an opportunity to experience the sacred. . . . and religious leadership which will facilitate his interpretation of the meaning of life.¹²

It is not true that man evolves away from the need for faith and the sacred.¹³

But I believe that faith and holiness need not attach themselves to power and mystery. Here religious evolution, despite periodic reverses, seems irreversibly to be moving in one direction. The direction is given by democracy and science, by the functional meaning of human intelligence and its correlative — compassion. As Fontinell put it:

While a God of power is no longer a fruitful symbol of man's faith, a God of love is — particularly when the processive incarnation of that love depends upon man's faith, hope and love.¹⁴

The first religious requirement, in a word, is depotesting God without emptying the term of meaning.

II

To abandon the syndrome is to clear the way toward a purified idea of God, the idea of God as Promise of Existence. The "Promise" is neither "Person" nor "Power" nor "Process" nor Mystery. It is not act in nature or in history as an instructing or directing force or entity or Will. It does not reveal itself in speech, in silence, in miraculous intrusions from realms beyond space and time, in books, in saints, in awards, in punishment, in sheer "Presence." It does not resurrect the dead nor does it rescue the drowning. It does not love and forgive or explode in fury and flood the earth. It does not create the universe and prescribe its conduct, daily, nightly, perennially. It does not belong to the universe of energies and functions. Nor is it hidden behind an impenetrable curtain of mystery. It does not require man to sacrifice his children or his mind. It does not

12. Andrew M. Greeley, *Unsecular Man* (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 261 ff.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

14. Eugene Fontinell, *Toward a Reconstruction of Religion: A Philosophical Probe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1970), p. 259.

ordain rituals nor does it “choose” its servants. It does not overwhelm them qua *Tremendum*.

Nor is it an emergent because it is here, now, in the fullness of its divinity, now, in future, for ever and everywhere. This stands in direct opposition to a comment by Agatha Christie, the famous mystery writer. In November, 1930, she wrote to her husband, Max, about Sir James Jean’s book, *The Mysterious Universe*, which she had just read. She confessed to have understood “very little of it,” yet it filled her “with nebulous ideas.” These she set forth with much bravado:

How queer it would be if *God* were in the future — something we never created or imagined but who is not yet — supposing him to be not *Cause* but *Effect*. The creation of God is what we are moving to — is one goal — the aim and purpose of all evolution — all our beliefs of God creating the world (on a very wasteful and cruel plan) and allowing pain etc. — are all *wrong*. . . . That God has made the world as it is and is pleased with it seems certainly not so. Originally man starved to death and froze to death (on top of coal in the ground) and every plague and pestilence caused by man’s stupidity was put down to “God’s Will.” If life on this planet is an accident, quite unforeseen, and against all the principles of the solar system — how amazingly interesting — and when may it end? In some complete and marvelous Consciousness . . . ?¹⁵

Admittedly, the great mystery writer is not the most scholarly source for theology. Yet, her idea of God as in the making has its attraction. It certainly brings to mind Samuel Alexander’s notion that “God is the whole universe engaged in process towards the emergence of this new quality,” namely, deity.¹⁶ But it also appears to have an affinity to a paragraph in Else Lasker-Schüler’s unforgettable *Das Hebräerland* (1937). In Jerusalem, she asked young Talmud students

whether they could tell me, how old God might be? This question, they opined unanimously, even their great Rav would be unable to answer, but I might ask Rabbi Kook personally or — his little, two-year-old granddaughter Zippora, because Adonai is not only the oldest of the old but also the youngest of the young — according to his own pronouncement: “I am that I shall be.” Unceasingly the sweetness of future eternity surrounds the Lord.¹⁷

God as Promise need not be awaited. He is not a future emergent. He is not man-made, not a figment of man’s imagination and speculation. He cannot be defined but He can be intuited. He embraces all reality qua possibility. His partial actualization is the human task. To believe in Him

15. Cited in Janet Morgan, *Agatha Christie — A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 194.

16. S[amuel] Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, II (New York: Dover, 1966 [1920]), p. 429 and passim.

17. Lasker-Schüler, *Op. cit.*, p. 312 ff. The last line of the poet’s scintillating prose is: “*Unaufhörlich umschwebt der Schmelz zukünftiger Ewigkeit den Herrn*” (Unceasingly, the sweetness of future eternity surrounds the Lord).

marks Israel's eternal faith which undergirds the earlier person-power-mystery formulations.

John Dewey came close to this but not close enough. He wrote that "The work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience."¹⁸ I hold the "undefined whole" to the Promise that holds the experience in its embrace. The "Promise" is also undefined but it is not vague. It suggests, direction. Its correlative is what Mordecai M. Kaplan called "salvation." Its overtone is not mystery of the "whole" but the experimentalism of social self-realization.

The Promise is not the *Tremendum* which, as Erwin B. Goodenough points out, "because of its strange vagueness best conveys the most terrifying part of our predicament, the very inchoateness of the terror without and within us."¹⁹ Rather, the Promise is the *Agendum*, that which can, and ought, to, be enacted if the *universum* is to be the City of Man, the City of God. The point of junction between present and future, actuality and possibility, is, as Guyau has it, "a flying point, a *direction*, a volition in pursuit of an end."²⁰ At this point stands, I suggest, as *direction*, not director, the Promise of Existence.

The idea of God as Promise of Existence needs to be developed. What may be derived from it qua "commitment," qua *mizvah*, needs to be worked out, although much of it is in the classic writings and in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. The new needs to be shown as continuous with the old. Its power to release Jewish spirituality and religiosity needs to be demonstrated again. Progressively, its meanings need to be revealed in the life, the thought, the institution of Jews and Jewish communities, notably the State of Israel.

In Nehemiah 8:9-10, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Priests say to the people who were weeping on hearing the words of the Torah: "... this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye grieved; for the joy of YHWH is your strength." Matthew Arnold called this "one short sentence the secret of Israel's religion and the religion of the Bible: 'Mourn not, nor weep, *The joy of the Eternal is your strength.*'"²¹ But, as I am suggesting, this "Eternal" is the Promise, and His joy is, indeed, our strength for all times.

18. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958 [1934]), p. 195.

19. Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Psychology of Religious Experiences* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 6. See, also, Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* and Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*.

20. M[arie Jean] Guyau, *The Non-Religion of the Future* (New York: Henry Holt, 1897), p. 401.

21. Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible*, ed. by Robert H. Super (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 248.

(If) There Is No “Commander”? . . . There Are No “Commandments!”

STEVEN L. JACOBS

I.

THOSE WHO KNOW ME KNOW THAT, whatever else may be said of me, I am a child of the Holocaust: that the events of 1933-1945, which, at their conclusion, realized the horrendous deaths of Six Million of our own, five million others, and twenty million Russians, have so affected my every waking moment that everything I do, everything I say, everything I think is, somehow, colored by that Holocaust.

Specifically, I am the last surviving male member of my family to bear our name, son of an escapee, a survivor, whose entire family was unknown to me, with the exception of a very few relatives — in this country now one; in Israel two; and in South America one. Today, I teach courses on the Holocaust in all three institutions of higher learning in my community; I write and lecture in other communities; I read everything that I can about the Holocaust in an attempt to fathom the *meaning* of those events; and I am presently working on a book dealing with the implications of the Holocaust, as well as gathering material for a series of projected works on a major scholar on genocide, Dr. Raphael Lamkin. Even more specifically, my very reasons for entering the rabbinate are the result of growing up as the child of a survivor. Whatever else it is, my rabbinate is my *personal* answer to the tragedy of my family and our people. It is my “NO!” to Adolf Hitler, may his name be blotted out, who, fortunately, failed in his quest to make our world *Judenrein*, free of Jews. It is my “YES!” that the people Israel and the various evolutions of our faith, called Judaism, possess continuing viability and dynamism.

And, yet, whatever else this Holocaust has done to me as I have grown toward maturity, it has shattered forever and all time the easy acceptance of the Jewish religious thinking that is most particularly identified with thinking about God and the just ways in which this world, supposedly created in response to Divine desire, came to be. My family background is not Reform; generations of my German-Jewish family were Orthodox. My Grandfather, whom I never knew, may his ashes rest in peace, was a pious Jew whose place was in his little synagogue every Sabbath year-round. For my Father, may he rest in peace, as best as I can express it, his Orthodoxy died in the concentration camps of Europe, amidst the ashes of his family. For the first three decades of his life in

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this country, after having escaped from Germany at the age of eighteen, he could not even put on a skull-cap without renewing the pain of his former experience.

All of which brings me to God. Or, perhaps, more accurately, all of which leads me away from God — from the historical and traditional understanding of God with which our Jewish People has long been identified. For me, and others like me, those ideas, too, died in the camps; they, too, are buried amidst those same ashes, in nameless graves and countless cemeteries made sacred by the very blood of our martyred millions.

The events of the Holocaust have shattered for me the historical religious ideas of our Jewish People and have forced me to *re-think* the entire process of my Jewish identity. That I have chosen the rabbinate as the vehicle wherein my thinking must take place, working amidst our Jewish people, in addition to the college campuses where I teach, should indicate my continual caring and commitment to the present and future survival of our people. But I no longer believe as did my Grandfather, killed by the Nazis, believed; I reject the God that my Father rejected because that God, too, died in those same camps, along with our family and our historical ideas.

Let me be even more specific. I no longer pray to a Commander God because I do not believe that this concept is accurately reflective of either the God of the Jewish People or of the historical experience of the Jewish People. This view bespeaks a potent, powerful God who interacts with this planet and with the creatures who inhabit it. It informs us that that same God truly cares about us and what happens to us and that *His* commandments, whatever else they are designed to do, are, ultimately, for our benefit. For me, this is simply not so.

Shall I now, given everything that I have thus far stated, affirm a God who “commands” me to observe “commandments” or “obligations”? Shall I lull myself into a false sense of security, comfortable with a God who “hears prayers,” when I know that my own meagre level of piety is so much less than that of my Grandfather Leo whose prayers evidently went unanswered, as did those of so many of our brothers and sisters?

Quite obviously, this I cannot do and be true to myself and to the experiences of my family and our People. What I must do, instead, is (1) *rethink* my understanding of God, God’s supposed relationship with humanity, and the ways in which this God appears to function, and (2) *rethink* and, therefore, redefine this whole concept of “commandments.”

II.

I am left with these alternatives: (1) Having now rejected the classical or historical or traditional Jewish understandings, I can walk out through the door; leave the Jewish people and look elsewhere to fulfill whatever spiritual needs I currently possess. Having committed myself to the rab-

binate, however, to serving in the congregational rabbinate, and to the rearing of a particular Jewish family, I have obviously *not* elected this option. (2) I can redefine my understandings of God, the relationship of God to the Jewish People, and the particular concept of commandment which is our concern. Equally as obvious, therefore, I have elected, out of my strong desire and personal need, both to remain within the Jewish People and to work within that same Jewish People, this second alternative.

Therefore, let me now state my conclusion, as baldly as I can, and explain it afterwards: *FOR ME, THERE IS NO GOD WHO IS A "COMMANDER," AND, THEREFORE, THERE ARE NO "COMMANDMENTS" EMANATING FROM THAT GOD. EXCEPT FOR THE EXIGENCIES OF HISTORY WHICH CONTINUE TO DENY US ANY OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE OUR JEWISH IDENTITY, THE ONLY "COMMANDMENTS" WHICH EXIST ARE THOSE WHICH WE WILLINGLY AND POSITIVELY TAKE UPON OURSELVES OUT OF OUR PERSONAL DESIRE TO BE POSITIVELY-AFFIRMING JEWS.*

The question which we must now ask is, "What criteria or standards can/do we use by which to incorporate "commandments" into our Jewish lives? It seems to me, if we are honest and truthful with ourselves, that there are six:

(1) *Intellectual*: I am willing to incorporate into my Jewish behavior those historical Jewish acts which do not offend my intellectual understanding of reality and which, also, appeal to my awareness of order and precision in the universe of which I am a part. It is not that I am bound to them by some external Presence or Force; it is, rather, that I choose to bind myself to those specifically Jewish acts which "make sense" to me. Here the rhythmic celebration of the Sabbath is the premier example.

(2) *Aesthetic*: There are those Jewish acts which provide me with aesthetic pleasure: visually, orally, aurally, tactfully, and, yes, even through a sense of smell. I am, therefore, willing to do them for that reason. Examples: the spices of Havdalah and the citron of Sukkot.

(3) *Emotional*: Because I am not totally a being of intellect, I have genuine emotional needs which, in turn, can be met through the doing of Jewish acts and, therefore, I make my own commitment to their doing because they meet those needs. Being *actively* involved in a Jewish community is paramount for me.

(4) *Physical*: There are those Jewish acts which address the very physical part of my being and ask of me certain responses which equally evoke certain positive reactions and I willingly do them for that reason. Ritual circumcision of an eight-day old Jewish male is one example.

(5) *Psychological*: In addition to my previously-mentioned needs, there are psychological needs which certain "commandments" may meet, and I am likewise prepared to do them for that reason. Celebrating the

Jewish calendar and Jewish life-cycle, together with my fellow Jews, addresses those needs.

(6) *Spiritual*: My own personal rejection of the historically-traditional Jewish understanding of God does not, for me, negate the entire Jewish religious enterprise. I do not minimize the sense of awe and wonder at life and the universe. Nor do I stifle within myself the yearning to reach out beyond myself for permanence — immortality if you prefer — which I can still define as “reaching towards God.” Even here, I am prepared to do those “commandments” which aid me in my halting attempts to reach out beyond myself. The disciplined acts of religious commitment free my mind to search for the meaning of life in this post-Holocaust world which I now inhabit.

Admittedly, these six criteria for the observance of any and all “commandments” are subjective. But honestly-recognized subjectivity is all that I have in the light of what transpired more than four decades ago. *The reality of my world is that there is no longer ANY authority structure, other than that to which I would willingly subject myself, that has authority over me.* Nor can I honestly compel anyone else to observe those “commandments.” I can only try to persuade those whom I am privileged to teach that there exists one *possible* way for individual persons or a family to make sense of their world, to affirm positively his/her/their Jewish selves.

Admittedly, these six criteria are selective in the sense that I — or anyone else — select from the ever-growing body of Jewish resource literature, which includes the various categories of “commandments,” those which give meaning to life. Thus, the only *required* “commandment” is that of study. Since I cannot command observance, the responsibility falls directly upon the shoulders of the individual to decide for himself/herself those “commandments” which he/she would willingly choose to observe. Such a mature and responsible recognition of the freedom to be and to do in this post-Holocaust world *requires* an equally mature commitment to study those same resources in order to make meaningful decisions. To refuse to do and to refuse to study is not Jewish freedom but Jewish stupidity; it is to reduce being Jewish to biology. And that notion the Nazis themselves carried to its logical and horrifying conclusion.

The time for Jewish guilt is long past. I no longer feel guilty if I do not fully observe the dietary system, if I no longer wear a *kippah* or *yarmulke* when I pray, if I take my family in the car to a picnic or the zoo on the Sabbath. I feel good about those “commandments” which I now choose to observe in a world which has destroyed forever any compulsive notion to observe. In so doing, I proudly affirm my place among the Jewish People and my willingness and determination to continue to work for the physical survival of the Jewish People and the spiritual survival of those who proudly wish to call themselves Jews. And I am defiant enough to reject any attempt by anyone else to superimpose any definitions upon me as to what constitutes Jewishness or Jewish identity and to couple such

definitions with extenal authority. The caustic query, "Who died and made you God?" has, for me, been answered by the deaths of the Six Million. Their very deaths have freed me from the constraints of the past and forced me to confront both the present and the future honestly by confronting reality "face to face." This I now choose to do to the best of my ability.

Ruth

ABRAHAM LINIK

Nowhere is it written
That the Moabite widow
Was beautiful,
Yet all winds swear:
Ruth
Was beautiful.

Unmarked graves lined
The fields of Moab.
Her womb —
Hollow, and barren.

But the hills of Judah
Echoed her song,
And the wheat
in the field
Whispered:
Obed, Jesse,
David the king.
Obed, Jesse,
David the king.

The Biblical and Rabbinic Underpinnings of the Constitution

BERNARD M. ZLOTOWITZ

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES of America has its underpinnings in Jewish legal literature. That the loftiest ideals expressed in the Bible were consciously and unconsciously operative in the minds of the framers is well known and documented, but less known are the Rabbinic teachings that indirectly influenced the formulation of the Constitution. The parallelism is very striking and more than a coincidence.

I. COMMENTARY

The Preamble

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

"We, the people." The very idea of a preamble is possibly biblical. Most written laws do not have a preamble, but the Constitution does. So does the Bible. The Bible is the constitution of the Jewish people and its preamble, the Ten Commandments, states its purpose, even though it does not come at the beginning of the Book. The Ten Commandments espouse one God, observance of the Sabbath, honoring parents, and forbid murder, adultery, bearing false witness and coveting, all of which form the very basis of ethical Judaism and all civilized law. It is interesting to note that Plato, in his dialogue on "The Laws," recommended that every law should have a preamble stating its purpose.

The very concept of the opening words, "We the People," is biblical in its declaring unequivocally that government derives its powers from the consent of the governed, that there is a covenantal relationship between those who govern and the governed. This idea stems from the Covenant at Sinai between the God of Israel and the people of Israel. A covenant implies a two-way relationship: I will be your God but you must be loyal to Me. And Israel says: We will be faithful to you provided you pro-

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tect us and be our exclusive God. Essentially, the Israelites declared: "We the People," if governed justly, acknowledge the authority of the Law and thereby agree to a covenantal relationship.

Another explanation: According to the first nine Federalist papers, the purpose of the opening words of the Preamble: "We, the people . . . in order to form a more perfect union" was to express a longing for peace on this continent. In our daily prayer book, written hundreds of years before the Constitution, there is a prayer expressing just that very idea and it is repeated many times: "He who makes peace in His heavens, may He make peace for us and all Israel." Also note the words of the Mishnah, as they appear in the "Ethics of the Fathers": "loving peace and pursuing it."¹

"establish justice." Compare "Justice, only justice shalt thou pursue."² Note well that one of the seven Noahitic Laws which were obligatory on all nations was the commandment to promote justice.

"insure domestic tranquility." This end is best accomplished by providing the people with a non-violent means for redressing grievances: the establishment of a judiciary system. Combining the Preamble, which addresses domestic tranquility, with Article I Section 8, "To constitute tribunals inferior to the Supreme Court," we can look to the Bible and to the Talmud (in *Sanhedrin*), which require the establishment of courts to redress grievances: "Judges and officers shalt thou appoint to thyself in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge thy people with a just judgment."³ And if the grievance is justified, it will be corrected and punishment exacted:

If thou take at all thy neighbor's raiment in pledge, thou shalt restore it unto him by the time the sun goeth down. For it is his only covering, it is his raiment for his skin; wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.⁴

Peaceful redress of grievances as a means of protecting the people from the tyranny of the majority has its roots in the Bible: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause, to incline after many, to wrest judgment."⁵ Thus the Constitution, through its provision of checks and balances, protects us from a tyrannical legislature.

"provide for the common defense." This concept is as old as the Bible itself, if not older. The Bible is very explicit on this point:

When thou goest out to battle against thy enemies, and thou seest horse, and chariot, people more in number than thou: be not afraid of them; for the Lord thy God is with thee, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

1. I:12

2. Dt. 16:20

3. Dt. 16:18

4. Ex. 22:25, 26.

5. Ex.23:2

And it shall be, when ye come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people; [origin of the military chaplain?] And he shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye come nigh this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint, fear not, and be not downcast, and do not tremble because of them; For the Lord your God it is who goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to help you.⁶

“*secure the blessings of liberty.*” Compare “. . . proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof . . . ,”⁷ as well as the Midrashic commentary on the biblical verse, “And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven (*haruth*) upon the tables.”⁸; read not *haruth* (graven) but *heyruth* (free) from *galuyoth* (exiles).⁹

One of the main purposes of the Constitution is to protect the liberty of the people. Cicero put it succinctly: “Law is the foundation of the liberty we enjoy. We are all servants of the law in order that we can be free.” Recall that the purpose of the Exodus was to enable Israel to receive the Torah at Sinai and become a free people by willingly serving God in obedience to His Torah.

Article I, Section 1.

“All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States . . .” The individual states, in order to form a more perfect union, had to give up certain powers; otherwise, the new country would not have had a chance to succeed. The Articles of Confederation, drawn up previously, had failed because each state had remained totally autonomous. That was not the case with the Constitution. Federal law, with certain exceptions, became the supreme law of the land. Note Judaism’s parallel law in the concept of *dina d’malkhuta dina*,¹⁰ in that Jewish law, in certain categories, was pre-empted by civil law. Had it been otherwise the Jew would not have been able to survive. Had the states not given up more of their autonomy, neither would the United States have survived. “The Law of the Land is Supreme” is an important rabbinic legalistic doctrine. Parenthetically, one may attribute the failure of the United Nations to the unwillingness of individual nations to compromise their autonomy.

Article III, Section 3.

“No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act . . .”

It is more than a coincidence that biblical teaching with regard to cap-

6. Dt. 20:1-4

7. Lev. 25:10

8. Ex. 32:16.

9. Exodus *Rabbah* 41:7.

10. *Baba Batra* 55a.

ital cases requires the testimony of at least two witnesses: "Upon the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death: he shall not be put to death upon the evidence of one witness."¹¹

Article Five of the Bill of Rights (The Fifth Amendment)

"No person . . . shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." The Talmud has a parallel law: "No man can incriminate himself" (literally, no man declares himself guilty *rasha*).¹²

Article Six of the Bill of Rights

"In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial . . . (and) to be confronted with the witnesses against him."

"*speedy and public trial*." Compare *bat dina batel dina* — justice delayed is justice denied (literally: judgment delayed is judgment voided).¹³

"*confronted with the witnesses against him*." It has been established from biblical times that the accused has the right to have the accuser face him. "If a witness of violence rise up against any man to testify against him for any wrong: Then shall both the men, who have the controversy, stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, who shall be in those days."¹⁴ In fact, the Zohar goes one step further: "A judge who listens

11. Dt. 17:6.

12. *Ket.* 18b; *Sanh.* 9b. That *rasha* means guilty in biblical and rabbinic legal terms just as *šaddiq* means innocent is supported by the following random samples: "Wilt thou destroy the innocent (*šaddiq*) with the guilty (*rasha*)?" (Gen. 18:25); " . . . For I will not acquit (*šaddiq*) the guilty (*rasha*) (Ex. 23:7); "Who acquit (*mašddiqay*) the guilty (*rasha*) for a bribe . . ." (Isa. 5:23); " . . . for the guilty (*rasha*) surround the innocent (*šaddiq*), so justice goes forth perverted" (Hab. 1:4).

Professor Harry M. Orlinsky concretizes this in connection with his discussion in his notes on the translation of the word *rasha*:

"It is, however, chiefly as a legal term that our root — and its antonym *rasha* — is employed, which mechanically employed 'righteous (ness)' fails to reproduce. Thus, in Gen. 18:23, NJV has correctly rendered (*ha-af tispe*) *šaddiq im-rasha* by '(Will You sweep away) the innocent along with the guilty?' in place of the older 'the righteous with the wicked.' Similarly, in Exodus 23:7, NJV has properly translated *ki lo ašdiq rasha* 'for I will not acquit the wrongdoer' (as against Trad., 'for I will not justify the wicked'). Or see the new rendering of *we-ḥišdiqū eth-ha-šaddiq we-hiršū'u eth-ha-rasha*: 'and a decision is rendered declaring the one in the right and the other in the wrong,' where the older version missed the force of *šaddiq* and *rasha* altogether: 'by justifying the righteous, and condemning the wicked' (Deut. 25:1)." (Harry M. Orlinsky, "Notes On The New Translation Of The Torah", JPS, 1969, p. 27). Lennard B. Thal similarly concludes that *rasha* is a legal term "which should not be surprising" (Lennard B. Thal, "The Legal Terminology And Context Of The Book Of Job," unpublished thesis, Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, 1973, p. 132).

13. *Sanh.* 95a.

14. Dt. 19:16, 17

to one litigant when the other is not present, it is as if he believed in an idol in addition to the true God.”¹⁵

Article Fourteen, Section 1

“... nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Every person is entitled by right to equal protection under the law. That the Constitution has a similar law to that of the Bible is more than a coincidence. The biblical injunctions are quite explicit: “One manner of judicial law shall ye have, the stranger shall be equal with one of your own country; for I am the Lord your God,”¹⁶ and “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the great; in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.”¹⁷

II. ANALYSIS

Are the similarities between the laws in the Constitution quoted above and their biblical and rabbinic counterparts a direct borrowing from Jewish sources? It is more than likely, that, in the case of biblical law, which the framers knew intimately, there was direct borrowing. As for talmudic law, they absorbed the Hebraic component through natural law.

While our founding fathers were well-schooled in the Bible and contemporary philosophic thought, they sought to separate religion from state for they knew that the intertwining of the two would result in persecution and civil strife. Yet, religious thought did subtly pervade discussions during the Constitutional Convention in the form of “universal truths” and, thereby, influenced legislation.

A contemporary example of this phenomenon is cited by Charles Silberman who tells of a man who came to his rabbi and asked, “what he should do, since he does not believe in God. ‘Act each day as though you believe in God,’ the rabbi told him — recite all the prayers and perform all the rituals required of the believer — ‘and before long you will find that you *do* believe’.”¹⁸ In an address to the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on June 12, 1987, Silberman repeated the example and then said that the same story, except in different garb, was attributed to the Methodist, John Wesley, and that it also exists in a variety of Catholic versions — certainly each unknown one to the other, thus attesting to the story’s universality.

The ideas and ideals of Jewish law continue to influence human thought and law, for truth, once uttered, becomes encapsulated in the

15. i, 179b.

16. Lev. 24:22.

17. Lev. 19:15.

18. Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (Random House, 1964), p. 14.

universe for all humankind to learn and grasp. The philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), concretized the concept of universal law in his philosophical thesis of the categorical imperative. Human beings, he argued, have an innate sense of moral law in the form of the categorical imperative (unconditional command) in knowing what is right and what should be done. Israel Abrahams, in laying the groundwork for his thesis on a Universal Truth, which he refers to as Natural Law, states:

Let us take as an example a view of life that has influenced both Judaism and Western civilizations: the "common ancestry of mankind" is an anthropological theory; the "brotherhood of man" is the same thing in a religious garb; that "all men are born equal" is a bit of political philosophy which amounts to the same thing; and "equality before the law" is the juristic aspect of the same doctrine.¹⁹

Abrahams goes on to state that divine law had a direct bearing on law in the American colonies before the Constitution, when "the judges of Massachusetts, Connecticut, the New Haven colony and West New Jersey had been commanded to inflict penalties according to the 'Law of God'."²⁰ The Jews developed a *ius naturale et gentium* ("Natural Law", literally, the law of nature and of nations), which was discernible in the universe. Jerome, the translator of the Bible into Latin "sees a reference to natural law in Isaiah XXIV, 5. He insists that Adam and Eve and Cain and Pharaoh were conscious of sinning against this natural law."²¹ Abrahams goes on and shows how natural law influenced not only European law but even American law and our Constitution, so that

in the history of jurisprudence, no other single force has been so potent in the shaping of modern European law as the notion that there was a *discoverable law of nature in the universe* (italics mine) . . . In England, this natural law was the formative principle in the development of Equity. On the Continent, it was the basis of the dissertations on which the legislation and codifications of the nineteenth century were founded. In the American colonies, it furnished the Bill of Rights of the various Constitutions. The appeal of the Declaration of Independence is to "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God."²²

In our own day, Robert Gordis attributes to natural law the ideals of two of the world's greatest documents: The American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. "They mark the apogee of the secularized natural law doctrine in modern times."²³ He points out that, in addition to the Greco-Roman source of natural law, there is another ethical source — the Hebraic. "That all men

19. I. Abrahams, *The Legacy of Israel*, ed. Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 378.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 385-386. See also Gabriel Sivan, *The Bible and Civilization*, (Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co.), 1979, pp. 124-143, where the same ideas are expressed.

23. Robert Gordis, *Judaic Ethics For A Lawless World* (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1986), p. 50.

are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” is a fusion of both Greek and Hebraic traditions. He emphasizes that the significant Hebraic ingredient generally has been overlooked.

... We need to recognize that the assumed sources of natural law have been too narrowly construed. ... The Hebraic tradition ... supplies precisely the element of dynamism which the static Greco-Roman worldview did not possess.²⁴

Furthermore, Gordis reminds us that the Hebraic contribution to natural law is not a new discovery.

Many seventeenth and eighteenth-century thinkers (such as Hugo Grotius and John Selden) knew there is another tradition in natural law, too long overlooked and neglected. It is the highly important Judaic component, embodied in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, and rabbinic literature. ...²⁵ Hugo Grotius recognized that a fundamental source of natural law is to be found in the biblical tradition. The Cambridge Hebraist John Selden was convinced that a doctrine of natural law is explicitly set forth in the talmudic concept of Noahide Laws. ...²⁶

Though Gordis does not specifically mention the Constitution, it certainly bears all the imprints of universal truth and thus embodies the influence of biblical and rabbinic law.

Although the framers of the Constitution were not versed in talmudic or rabbinic law, they nevertheless had embraced the Hebraic legal tradition in the form of natural law. Mortimer Adler called this, “understood truth” as opposed to “simple truth.”

To know that something is true is knowledge simply, or bare knowledge. A fact or truth (it does not make much difference which word you use) can be known simply, or it can be understood as well as known. Clearly, understood truth is superior to truth simply known.²⁷

Mordecai Kaplan made a similar observation when he instructed his granddaughter at her Bat Mitzvah: “May you know what you learn and understand what you know.”

Our nation was conceived by patriots who were possessed of “understood truth” — natural law that guided them in their deliberations. Just as the Bible and Talmud concretized Israelite society, so does the Constitution provide a fixed foundation for the American system of government. This nation’s steadfast adherence to the Constitution, now 200 years old, is a tribute to the wisdom of the founding fathers, who had true vision to use ethical statements of the distant past to forge the future.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

27. Mortimer J. Adler, *We Hold These Truths* (MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 25, 26.

The Talmud -- A Source for Yiddish

THEODORE FRIEDMAN

I RECALL OUR PROFESSOR OF GERMAN AT City College, New York, where most of us came from Yiddish-speaking homes, telling us that Yiddish was Middle High German, the German spoken in thirteenth-century Germany. He failed, however, to recognize that a very significant proportion of even present-day Yiddish, in its vocabulary, phrases and proverbs, derives from the Hebrew and Aramaic of Talmud and Midrash. These instances run into the hundreds, if not thousands. By way of illustration, one offers the merest handful of examples. *Efsher* (perhaps), *halevai* (would that it were so), *avade* (certainly), *a masse* (a story), *mistame* (one may assume), *korbon* (victim), *aveyra* (sin), *broche* (blessing), *ganov* (thief). Then there are the words and phrases which, though based on Talmud and Midrash, are original creations of Yiddish. A *melamed* (teacher), a *mayvin* (connoisseur), *baal tzedoke* (a charitable man), *shadchon* (matchmaker), *gevir* (a rich man), *beys olom* (literally, eternal house, a cemetery), *kabtzon* (poor man). These words are not to be found in Talmud or Midrash, certainly in the form and meaning which they have in Yiddish. And what of the hundreds of phrases and proverbs that derive, in one way or another, from ancient Sages of Israel? (Of these, more anon). So, then, our mothers and grandmothers who had studied neither Talmud or Midrash, spoke a language chockful of Talmudic idiom, evidence of how deeply and broadly ancient Jewish literature had once penetrated Jewish life, even fashioning the language spoken, until a generation or two ago, by millions of Jews.

One can hardly read a paragraph of even modern Yiddish without coming across such words or phrases. Why, for example, the redundancy in the phrase *a shande un a charpe* (it's a shame and a disgrace)? Would not either one of these synonyms suffice? It certainly would, but that is the form in which the phrase occurs in Hebrew in the Talmud: *oy l'ota busha, oy l'ota klama*. Yiddish not only borrowed freely from the ancient Jewish sources, it took Talmudic phrases and, by some kind of linguistic alchemy that is not always traceable, gave them an entirely new meaning. In the Talmud, the Aramaic phrase *meheyche teyse* means: whence do you derive the law? In Yiddish, the phrase has come to mean: certainly, or why not? In the Talmud, the word *hakelal* means: this is the rule. In Yiddish, it means: in summary or in brief. Here is one final example of this linguistic transformation.

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When the Talmud refers, as it does from time to time, to some past historic event, it goes on to declare somewhat interrogatively, "what was, was"; that is to say, what bearing does this have on the question before us, what can one learn from it? In Yiddish, the literal translation of the phrase *vos iz geven, iz geven*, means: the past is not coming back; what is the point of bringing it up?

Yiddish proverbs in relation to their Talmudic origin fall into several categories. There are those which are simply Yiddish versions of the Talmudic adage. The only difference besides language is that Yiddish tends to put the saying into the form of a readily remembered jingle. In Yiddish, one says: a little and a little make a full plate: *a bisele un a bisele macht a fule shisele*. The Midrash puts it in prose: "A drop and a drop make a full measure." In Yiddish, one says: "The apple does not fall far from the tree," *der epel fallt nit veit fun boym*. The meaning is that of the familiar "a chip off the old block." The Talmud puts it less picturesquely when it asserts that "the deeds of the daughter are like those of her mother." In Yiddish, "to put oneself on one's feet" means to acquire a sound economic base for oneself: *zich shtellen oif dee fis*. Thus, a young man might say in Yiddish, when I get on my feet, I'll think of marriage. Now, why should standing on one's feet be tantamount to earning a good living? Because, the Talmud says, by a clever play on a word, that a man's money puts him on his feet.

Then there are the Yiddish sayings which, while not direct translations of the ancient sources, are free adaptations of them. Imagine this situation. A notorious card player returns home in the early hours of the morning after a night with his cronies. Inadvertently, he wakes up his wife. In Yiddish, one would say that "he caught it from his wife both cold and hot": *er hot gehat oif kalts un oif varms*. This curious reference to temperature becomes clear when juxtaposed to the statement in the Midrash that the wicked in Gehenna are punished for twelve months, six months by ice-cold water and six months by boiling hot water.

Many Yiddish proverbs have as their background one or another Talmudic law. Thus, if you want to know how a sick friend is faring, one says in Yiddish, don't ask his doctor, ask the sick friend: *freg nit dem rofe, freg dem chole*. The following situation is discussed in the Talmud. On the approach of Yom Kippur, someone is sick and says that he feels that he is in no condition to fast. His doctor, however, says that he can fast without fear of negative effects on his health. In deciding the law in this matter, the Talmud says that we follow the opinion of the patient and not that of his doctor. The law permits him not to fast on Yom Kippur. Therefore, the patient knows more about the actual state of his health than does his doctor and, hence, the above proverb.

The current Americanism, "the bottom line," comes from the Yiddish phrase, *die untershte shure*. That, in turn, comes from the Talmud. In talmudic times, when one wrote a note of indebtedness, it was custom-

ary to include the sum in two places, one at the top of the document and, again, at the bottom. When there was a discrepancy between the two figures, it was the one on the bottom that was valid.

A Yiddish proverb declares that one does not have to pay for looking: *far kuken zollt men nit kein gelt*. And, again, the origin is to be found in a Talmudic discussion on the invasion of privacy. Is one allowed to build a structure that would permit one to look into a neighbor's house or field? Is the presumable damage done thereby recoverable by law? The answer is that such damage is not actual damage and, therefore, not recoverable by law.

In this category, one recalls the proverb that one does not punish someone with two whips at the same time: *mit zvey beitchen shmeist men nit*. Here, too, the adage reflects Talmudic law. Someone has committed a religious offence for which the prescribed punishment is flagellation. In doing so, he has also caused someone material damage. The law declares that he is subject to flagellation but does not have to pay for the damage that he has caused. There is, however, a contrary opinion, i.e., that he makes restitution but is not subject to flagellation. In either event, all agree that we do not subject a person to two punishments at the same time. With its invocation of whips, the proverb puts it more graphically.

When the Yiddish proverb declares that silence is also a form of speech: *geshviigen iz oych geret*, it is obviously reflecting the Talmudic principle, applicable in some instances, that when a defendant against whom a claim is being made remains silent, then his silence may be construed as admission of the validity of the claim.

Curiously enough, some Yiddish sayings flatly contradict those found in Talmud and Midrash, though, to the best of my knowledge, there is no Yiddish saying that negates a Talmudic law. In describing a deaf man, a Yiddish speaker would say that "he is as deaf as the wall": *toyb vee dee vant*. One asks the inevitable question: Why as a wall? Why not as a door or a chair? The answer lies in the Talmud's assertion that "walls have ears." But, if so, then the Yiddish comparison is most inept. Rashi, in explaining the Talmudic saying, offers the rather ingenious interpretation that someone may be hiding behind the wall and eavesdropping. But, along comes the common sense of folksy Yiddish and contradicts the Talmudic saying. Do walls really have ears? Of course not. Hence, "as deaf as a wall." In this category, one includes the proverb that "a hundred and a hundred and one are all the same": *hundert un hundert un eyns iz als eyns*. Why these particular numbers? Because the Talmud asserts that he who reviews his lesson a hundred times cannot be compared to him who reviews his lesson a hundred and one times. This the Yiddish proverb denies.

Aside from law, there is the vast domain of legend and lore. On this, too, Yiddish draws freely for its own purposes. When, in Yiddish, one says of someone that he has the head of a bastard: *a mamzerishe kop*, one

means thereby that he is exceedingly astute. Now the Talmud does declare that most bastards are highly intelligent. But what is the basis for the assertion? Here, the Talmudic commentators come to our aid. The man who fathered the bastard must have been exceedingly clever. The proof? He was wily enough to seduce a married woman. And since the son may be presumed to take after the father, he, too, must be uncommonly intelligent.

Occasionally, a Yiddish proverb parodies the words of the ancient Sages. The following will serve to illustrate. The Bible relates that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prayed (when she was barren) that she be granted a son. In her plight as a barren, taunted woman, the Midrash adds, she declared that she would be satisfied even if she were granted an average boy, "neither exceedingly wise nor overly foolish." In Yiddish, one says in derision of someone's acumen, that "he is no great sage and no small fool": *nisht kein groyser khochem un nisht kein kleyner naar*.

Generally, however, Yiddish remains faithful to the intent of the Talmudic original. "For tomorrow," says the proverb, "let God worry": *far morgen zoll Gott sorgen*. The adage reflects the Talmudic statement that he who has enough to eat today and asks what shall we eat tomorrow is a man of little faith.

We conclude this snippet of Yiddish derived from ancient Jewish literature with two common Yiddish phrases. The first is hardly traceable to its Talmudic origin but a little deduction will avail. The Yiddish equivalent of the American colloquialism, "live it up," is *chai gelebt*. Now the word *chai*, in this instance, is the genitive of the Hebrew noun *chaim*, life, and *gelebt* means lived. Actually, the phrase is a kind of shorthand for the proverb that even short-term living is life in the fullest sense of the word: *chaye shaah heyst oych gelebt*. What is the authority for the latter statement? The Talmud, in the following passage. Here is the situation posited by the Sages. A building has collapsed on Yom Kippur, burying a man in the debris. To save the victim's life, one is required by law to dig him out even if this means violating the sanctity of Yom Kippur by the labor involved. If, upon reaching him, the rescuers discover that the man has been mortally injured and has but a few hours to live, they must, nevertheless, continue the rescue operation since temporary life, *chaye shaah*, is deemed normal life. And virtually nothing in Jewish law stands in the way of saving a life.

But, then, isn't everyman's life, at bottom, temporary? Therefore, one ought to make the most and best of it. Hence the counsel, *chai gelebt* — live it up.

Anyone at all familiar with Yiddish knows the phrase *shlog zich kopf im vant*: "beat your head against a wall." The latter translation, while quite literal, is not to be equated with the Americanism of beating one's head against a wall. The latter means you are trying to solve an insoluble problem. I would equate the Yiddish with the colloquialism "that's your prob-

lem." That is the phrase which Yiddish-speaking parents would use when they were being pestered by their children with the question, "what shall I do now?" So, in Yiddish, one beats one's head against the wall when one is in a state of angry frustration.

The phrase comes from the Midrash in the following odd tale. Once, Rabbis Gamaliel and Joshua (Sages of the end of the first century), found themselves in Rome, where Rabbi Gamaliel was accosted by a man whom the Midrash calls a philosopher. (It must be recalled that, in antiquity, natural science was regarded as a branch of philosophy.) Desiring to test the highly touted wisdom of the Jewish Sages, the man put the following question to Rabbi Gamaliel: How long does it take for a snake to gestate and give birth? Rabbi Gamaliel was non-plussed.

Actually, the Midrash goes on to relate, the Gentile philosopher knew the answer since he had completed a successful experiment on the subject. On seeing two snakes in dalliance, he had taken both of them and put them into a sealed box. Through a tiny aperture he fed them for seven years. At the end of that time, he found that the female snake had given birth.

Disturbed and downcast by his inability to answer the philosopher's question, Rabbi Gamaliel came upon his colleague, Rabbi Joshua. Noting the dispirited look in Gamaliel's face, Joshua inquired as to its cause. When he heard the story, Joshua declared that the answer was readily available in the correct interpretation of a certain Biblical verse, which he forthwith supplied. Rabbi Gamaliel immediately returned to the philosopher and gave him the correct answer, whereupon the philosopher declared, "What took me seven years to discover you have discovered in a thrice." "In anger and frustration," the tale concludes, "the philosopher began to beat his head against the wall."

This handful of examples, to which many more can readily be added, suffice to indicate how Yiddish borrowed, adapted, transformed and even, on occasion, challenged the wisdom of Israel's ancient Sages. Thus, he who understands Yiddish understands a language resonant with their thought and fancy.

*The Garden of Eden: From Re-Creation to Reconciliation**

BERNARD OCH

THE GARDEN OF EDEN NARRATIVE PROVIDES a symbolic description of a caesura in the basic design of creation, resulting in a disruption of the original relationship between God and mankind. The Creation/garden of Eden introduction has set the stage upon which the drama of human history will unfold. Man and woman, who can no longer relate to God within the original creational framework of harmony, still remain creatures of God, subject to His authority and command. The Divine-human relationship, although corrupted, remains in force contingent upon the ongoing encounter between man and God within the framework of human life and history, which is characterized by imperfection, alienation and division. The basic motifs governing this encounter have been delineated in the Creation/garden of Eden narrative: election, command and judgment. God will choose certain individuals, then a people; He will enter into a relationship with them based on the Divine command and then mete out reward or punishment according to their actions. Mankind has set out on a path which will lead from Cain to Noah, to Abraham and the Patriarchs, and will finally culminate with the people of Israel at Sinai. The Covenant at Sinai becomes the ultimate attempt at Divine-human reconciliation: the definitive act of Divine revelation whose purpose is to repair the disastrous effects of human disobedience and to restore the original harmony and trust which existed between man and God.

In the Biblical narrative, the path which moves from Creation to Covenant is described as a series of alienations and separations from God. Mankind's estrangement from God is portrayed not as a one-time event but as an ongoing process of disobedience and rebellion. The history of mankind is characterized by man's constant refusal to accept the limits of his finiteness and creatureliness, and by his efforts to acquire a power and independence which are beyond the possibilities of human existences. Adam's act of disobedience is but the first in a series of transgressions which lead to an ever increasing estrangement of man from God and from his fellow human beings. The basic lesson is that individuals

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and peoples bring destruction upon themselves by exceeding the limits and boundaries which God has set for all human existence and endeavor. This process of estrangement, with its disastrous consequences for mankind, is illustrated by four stories which, together with the garden of Eden, constitute the period of primeval history that precedes the patriarchal narratives: Cain, sons of God, flood and Babel.

Thematically, the primeval period of history is described as a progressive deterioration of the original unity and harmony of creation. Genesis 1-11 describes two opposite and contradictory movements as Divine Creation is contrasted with human decreation. In Genesis 1, God's creative activity unfolds as a progression from initial chaos to ultimate order and harmony. Here, obedience to God's creational commands is followed by the bestowal of Divine blessing, first upon living creatures and, then, upon man. Genesis 2 constitutes the transition from creation to disintegration. It describes the network of essential relationships found among God, man, animals and nature which will subsequently dissolve and disintegrate in the course of events leading from Eden to Babel.

In Genesis 3-11, the dynamic of creation is reversed and replaced by a dynamic of decreation, a regression from harmony back to chaos. Here, the expansion of transgression and violence from the individual to humanity as a whole is followed by Divine punishment: from expulsion to homelessness, to the limitation of human life, to the almost complete destruction of creaturely existence, to the dissolution of the unity of mankind. Within the framework of primeval history, the flood and Babel narratives represent the final stages in a process of human and cosmic disintegration which began at Eden; it is the chronicle of man's undoing of God's creation.

The reversal of creation reaches its climax in the flood narrative where the totality of human violence and corruption provokes God to an act of cosmic destruction.

And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end to all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:12-13).

The flood is not just another punishment; it is the ultimate punishment — the near annihilation of the earth through a return to the primeval watery chaos out of which it was created. The separations and boundaries of creation are obliterated as the earth reverts to its original chaotic formlessness. Mankind, through violence and corruption, destroys the fabric of human life and community; God completes the process of disintegration by destroying the structure of earthly existence. Ironically, man and God, who were once partners in creation (Chapter 2), have now become "partners" in decreation.

The flood narrative, however, marks not only an end but also a new beginning, a recreation. This new beginning is represented by the cove-

nant which God establishes with Noah as well as the reaffirmation of His original blessing to man. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (Genesis 9:1). The relationship between man and God has been stretched to its utmost limit, but it has not been destroyed. One family survives and becomes the basis for the preservation of mankind and the continuity of God's blessing. God's covenant with Noah is a Divine guarantee of the preservation and constancy of nature upon which human life depends. God promises that He will never again be provoked by human violence to destroy the order and regularity of nature. It is important to note that this promise is made despite the fact that the flood has not brought about any change in the nature of man (Genesis 8:21). Mankind's inclination towards evil remains constant, unaffected by the severity of God's punishment. The Noah covenant is completely unilateral, unlike the reciprocal covenants which will be established with Abraham and with the people of Israel. It rests entirely on God's promise without any reference to human action or commitment.

The recreation after the flood is, therefore, by no means a replica of the original creation, for human violence has effectively corrupted the elemental relations which prevailed at the time of creation. Living creatures who once coexisted in harmony with man will, henceforth, live in a state of fear and dread. "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the field and upon every bird of the air" (Genesis 9:2). Furthermore, the relations among human beings have so deteriorated that a specific law prohibiting the taking of human life is now introduced. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own image" (Genesis 9:6). It is significant that these verses, which describe the broken relationships governing human and animal existence (Genesis 9:2-6), are placed between the twofold reiteration of God's original blessing to mankind, "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1 and 9:7). The message is clear: despite the deterioration of human life and existence, God reaffirms His blessing, thereby redeeming man from the consequences of his actions and preserving the possibility of Divine-human reconciliation.

Tragically, the process of disintegration is resumed directly after the flood with the tower of Babel, where the scattering of nations is presented as a symbol of the dissolution of mankind's unity. The Babel episode marks the final stage of primeval history and corresponds to the initial act of human transgression in the garden of Eden. In both narratives, the individual and mankind, as a whole, are guilty of overstepping the limits of human, creaturely existence. The building of a tower at Babel, like the eating of a forbidden fruit, is an attempt to replace God as the center of human life by acquiring security and independence in separation from God. God responds to man's desire to achieve permanent power and autonomy by destroying the unity of mankind. "Come, let us go down, and there confuse

the language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). The punishment for Babel is the ultimate division and separation of mankind. The "confusion of their language" is but an outward manifestation of the inability of human beings to communicate with, and understand, one another, perhaps even when they speak the same language and use the same words. The plurality of languages and the dispersion of humanity are preventive punishments, God's attempt to prevent mankind from acquiring a power and security which exceed the limits of human existence and lead to destruction and dehumanization.

The division of humanity into diverse peoples and different languages marks the transition from primeval events to the history of the people of Israel. Out of the dispersion, God chooses one people whose ultimate mission will be the reunification of mankind through the acceptance of Divine authority and obedience to Divine command. The history of Israel, therefore, begins with a command:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Genesis 12:1-3).

These verses are a reaffirmation of God's original intentions for man: land, posterity and a Divine-human relationship which will bring blessing to all humanity. The history of mankind as it unfolded from the garden of Eden to the tower of Babel is now encapsuled in the history of one people chosen by God to reverse the process of disintegration which has brought destruction and disunity upon humanity.¹

The election of Abraham marks a new point of departure in the process of recreation which began after the flood. With Noah, God reinstituted the blessing of procreation and reestablished the ongoing structure of nature. With Abraham, God reinstates the original, creational relationship with mankind based on Divine command and human obedience. For this purpose, God must create a new being who will serve as the mediator of God's blessing to "all the families of the earth." The words, "be a blessing," have been rightly seen as "a command by God to history, in the manner of His words during creation."² God's address to

1. An example of the reversal of disintegration can be found in God's address to Abraham where the "great name" promised to Abraham can be contrasted to the "name" which the people at Babel vainly attempted to acquire. Here, God freely grants to Abraham what the generation at Babel attempted to secure independently and arbitrarily. Ironically, while the building of the tower was motivated by a desire for security, the granting of a "great name" to Abraham is predicated on a readiness to abandon security.

2. Benno Jacob, *Genesis*, pp. 86-87. The author emphasizes the creation motif in God's charge to Abraham by pointing out that the word "bless" appears five times, just as the word "light" appears five times in the creation account. He writes, "Through Abraham a second world is called into being, a world of blessing for man by man."

Abraham goes beyond the promise of land and increasing posterity; it points to an abundance of blessing which is capable of reversing the process of disintegration and of reconstituting the Divine-human partnership of creation. God remains the source of blessing; Abraham and the people of Israel become the instrument and purveyor of blessing to all mankind.

The command, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house" can be understood as containing an allusion to the act of Divine creation in Genesis 1. In both instances, the act of creation is based on separation and differentiation. Here, the original separation between "light" and "darkness" is applied to the area of human existence, as Abraham is commanded to separate himself radically from all past ties and natural bonds. The command is more than a test of obedience; it is a sign of Abraham's entrance into a new realm of being reminiscent of God's original intention for mankind. At the age of seventy-five, Abraham stands before God as a *tabula rasa*: a man without country, kindred or parental ties — a man without a past. Abraham must completely remove himself from the natural time-space constructs which have determined his past existence so that he can enter into a unique relationship with God as the recipient of Divine promise and blessing. Henceforth, Abraham's ties to land, family and humanity will be totally determined by the word and command of God. To all intents and purposes, Abraham has been reduced to a kind of "non-being" out of which he will be recreated by the command of God and refashioned "in the image of God."³ Abraham now belongs exclusively to God whom he will serve and obey.

In this act of transformation and creation, an entirely new step has been taken on the path of Divine-human encounter and reconciliation. God's address to Abraham can be understood as a reverse reenactment of Adam's expulsion from the garden of Eden. There, Adam is removed from the locus of Divine harmony and unity and is set on a road which leads to increasing transgression and disintegration. Here, Abraham is taken out of the land of confusion and chaos and is placed on a road which leads to the land of reconciliation and reunification with God. The road leading from Haran to the land of Canaan symbolizes the return of man to Eden and to God. Abraham and the promised land provide the counterpoint and answer to Adam and the garden of Eden. In both situations, occupation and possession of the physical space granted to man depend entirely upon obedience and trust in God. Where Adam failed,

3. The Midrash refers to Abraham as new creation, in its commentary on the verse, "And I will make of you a great nation" (Genesis 12:2). The Midrash points out that the use of the verb "*asa*" corresponds to its use in the creation story, "And God made (*vayaas*) the firmament" (Genesis 1:7), and teaches that, in Abraham, God has created a new being (Midrash Genesis *Raba* chap. 39, sec. 11). The uniqueness and singularity of Abraham is further emphasized in the midrashic commentary on Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (*behebaram*)". The Hebrew word, "*behebaram*," which is an anagram for "Abraham" teaches that the entire world was created on the merit of Abraham (Midrash Genesis *Raba* chap. 12, sec. 9).

Abraham succeeds, "And Abraham believed the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). This pronouncement of belief expresses Abraham's complete trust in God and his acceptance of the Divine plan for himself and his people. The original relationship between God and mankind which was broken by Adam's disobedience is now re-established through Abraham's trust and obedience.

The figure of Abraham provides not only an answer to past occurrences but, also, a prophetic glance into the future, for the events in Abraham's life are to be seen as paradigmatic experiences which define the essential nature of the people of Israel and its future relationship with God. The Abraham narrative presents a microcosmic description of the history and destiny of Israel and sets forth the basic characteristics of its existence before God. Like Abraham, the people of Israel will be taken from the family of nations and placed on a road whose destination and direction lie entirely in God's hands, a road which leads to a new land and a new existence. The journey from Egypt, like the journey from Haran, unfolds within the parameters of Divine promise and command, the defining of the goal and the pointing of the way.

God's promise binds His people to a future which, based on the Abraham experience, is highly incongruous with existing reality and experience. The impact of God's promise is to create a state of constant tension between present reality and future fulfillment. "It is from promise that there arises that element of unrest which allows of no coming to terms with a present that is unfulfilled."⁴ Moreover, this element of unrest enters into Abraham's relationship with God as the prolonged interval between promise and fulfillment gives rise to anxiety and doubt regarding the very feasibility of God's promise.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live in Thy sight!" (Genesis 17:17-18).

The birth of Isaac to parents who are far beyond the age of fertility and conception is the classic example that the fulfillment of promise has nothing whatsoever to do with the normal and natural course of events, but depends entirely on the will and power of God. This is the lesson which the generation of the desert, unfortunately, failed to understand and, as a result, they were punished by extinction (Numbers 14).

The Abraham narrative reaches its climax in an event which reveals the extreme, even frightening, uncertainly and ambivalence inherent in the command/promise relationship of God to Israel. Command and

4. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 102. Moltmann emphasizes the inherent opposition between promise and existing reality. He writes, "It (promise) provokes a peculiar incongruence with being, in the consciousness of hoping and trusting. It does not glorify reality in the spirit, but is out for its transformation. Hence it does not give rise to powers of accommodation, but sets loose powers that are critical of being" (pp. 118-119).

promise are inextricably bound together, inasmuch as command is the constant call to obedience in anticipation of the promise fulfillment. The sacrifice of Isaac describes the ultimate threat to the promise fulfillment which arises, not from existent reality or experience, but from the explicit command of the very God who is the originator of promise. The command to sacrifice, thus, symbolizes not only the radical separation of promise from command but also the absolute negation of promise. Abraham is confronted with an impossible dilemma where obedience to God's command stands in direct opposition to the fulfillment of God's promise.

The command to sacrifice Isaac is the final act in a drama which began with God's initial address to Abraham at Haran. There, Abraham was called upon to cut himself off from his past; here, he is commanded to separate himself from his future. These two commands symbolize Abraham's removal from the temporal and finite categories of human existence. Abraham now enters a new realm of being which is defined entirely by the word and command of God. In the deepest sense, Abraham is no longer the object of command; he is now the personification of command. With Abraham, command and response are no longer separated but have merged together in an act of complete obedience and trust.⁵ Emptied of past ties and future expectations, Abraham stands alone in the presence of God, a new creation who now exists as the bearer and embodiment of God's word and blessing to mankind.

For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me . . . because you have done this . . . I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants . . . and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:12-18).

The process of transformation and creation which began at Haran is now consummated at Moriah. The sacrificing of Isaac, therefore, goes far beyond a test of obedience and symbolizes man's reunion with God in the original bond which existed prior to Adam's act of disobedience in the garden of Eden. Abraham on Moriah is the fulfillment and answer to Adam in Eden. Faced with a command of extreme incomprehensibility, Abraham, in contrast to Adam, responds with complete obedience and trust, and restores the relationship of original harmony with God.

The course of disintegration and alienation from God, which began at Eden, is now halted through an event of Divine-human symbiosis which opens the way for the ultimate act of reconciliation: God's revelation to Israel at Mount Sinai. The journey which began at Eden now moves inevitably towards Sinai — inevitably but not immediately, for an

5. This is the force of Abraham's response, "Here I am," which precedes God's command to sacrifice Isaac. With Abraham, the normal sequence of command followed by response is reversed as Abraham proclaims his complete readiness to obey prior to hearing the specific command. "God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac . . .'" (Genesis 22:1-2).

interval of four hundred years separates God's promise to Abraham from His revelation to Israel. "Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years'" (Genesis 15:13). The four hundred years of slavery mark not only that period required for the moral forfeiture of the land of Canaan by its inhabitants (Genesis 15:16), but also constitute a necessary stage in the realization of God's plan for the people of Israel.

The exodus from Egypt is to be understood as an act of creation as well as liberation. The Creator God appears, for the first time, as the Redeemer God whose creative power extends into history in order to create a people. The creation of Israel is patterned after the original, cosmic creation and describes how a people is created out of historical "nothingness." During the period in Egypt, Israel becomes, as it were, a "no people," divested of those elements which define and shape a people: land, culture, language and history. The four hundred years of slavery represent a *reductio ad nihilum* out of which God creates a new people through events as awesome and spectacular as the acts of cosmic creation (Exodus 15).⁶ This historical *creatio ex nihilo* is of utmost significance in defining the nature of Israel's relation to God and mankind. Firstly, it elevates the people of Israel to a position of cosmic importance in God's overall scheme for creation. Israel is not only chosen by God to serve as the mediator of blessing to mankind; it is, in fact, created by God to fulfill this purpose. Israel's creation is its election. This is the uniqueness of Israel: a people whose essence precedes its existence; a people which has a reason for being before it has a being; a people that can not define itself by virtue of its existence, but, rather, exists by virtue of defining itself. Consequently, Israel can never take its existence for granted; it must continuously redefine and evaluate its existence by its essence.

Secondly, the "creatio ex nihilo" emphasizes Israel's radical and absolute dependence on the Creator God. The people of Israel comes into being as the exclusive possession of God who has formed it from the womb, "Know that the Lord is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3). Israel acquires its very existence as a people through the creative act of God. Should Israel turn away from God, it would forfeit its right to exist as God's people and revert to the initial status of a "no people." "And the

6. The Midrash describes in detail the similarities between the redemption of Israel and the creation of the world:

God said, "For the sake of Israel I will create the world: the division between light and darkness corresponds to the light given to Israel during the darkness plague; the separation of the heavenly waters corresponds to the division of the waters of the Red Sea; the luminaries which divide day from night correspond to God leading Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire at night; and the breadth of life given to man corresponds to the Torah, the Tree of Life, given to Israel". (L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* [JPS, 1954], p. 51).

Lord said, 'Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people and I am not yours' (Hosea 1:9).

Thirdly, the conjunction of creation and redemption establishes the authoritativeness and legitimacy of the entire Exodus/Sinai event. The Redeemer God is, at the same time, the Creator God who created the whole world and is responsible for its order and preservation. Cosmic creation provides the crucial supposition and ground for God's redeeming work in history. The theophany at Sinai can be adequately understood only if the point of departure is the Creator God who now appears as the Redeemer of Israel. The creation of the world and the creation of Israel exemplify the same Divine dispensation, and they derive from the same Divine purpose of redemption.⁷

The stage is now set for the revelation at Sinai which marks the culmination and fulfillment of the Creation/garden of Eden prolegomenon. The line which moved from creation to decreation, from unity to disintegration, now returns to its initial starting point as the revelation scene at Sinai is juxtaposed to the primeval events of creation and disobedience. The encounter between God and Israel at Sinai can be seen, accordingly, as a reenactment of the original encounter between God and man at Eden. Reenactment entails reentrance, as God reenters the time-space constructs of human existence to reestablish with mankind the original Divine-human relationship which was broken in the garden of Eden. For this purpose, God has created a new people to stand before Him at Sinai as Adam stood in His presence at Eden. What began at Creation is now completed at Sinai.⁸

God's call to Moses to ascend the mountain is preceded by a period of six days, which alludes to the six days of cosmic creation.

The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai; and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the

7. Rash, in his commentary on Genesis 1:1, refers to God's cosmic creation as the ground for His redeeming activity in history. He points out that the Bible, which is a book of laws, begins with the creation of the world rather than with the first commandment to the people of Israel (Exodus 12:2) in order to establish God's sovereignty over the entire earth which serves as the basis for His redeeming function concerning Israel and provides legitimacy for Israel's claim to the promised land (Rashi, Genesis 1:1, *Miqra'ot Gedolot*).

8. The Midrash states that the whole of creation was dependent upon Israel's acceptance of the Torah. God said to the objects of creation, "If Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue and endure, otherwise, I shall turn everything back into chaos again." The whole of creation was thus kept in dread and suspense until the revelation at Sinai, when Israel received and accepted the Torah, and so fulfilled the condition made by God when He created the Universe (Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, p. 52). According to various midrashim, the Torah actually existed prior to creation and God took counsel with Her concerning the creation of the world. The Torah advised Him to create the world and said, "Lord and Sovereign of the Universe! You are the Sovereign and the King, but there is no host over whom You can rule; there is also no people who could pay honor unto You and glorify Your name." And the Creator listened to the counsel of the Torah for it pleased Him greatly (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 3).

cloud. And Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain (Exodus 24:16-18).

On the climactic seventh day, Moses goes up the mountain to receive God's revelation, the Torah. The Torah, which is referred to as the Tree of Life, "She is a Tree of Life to them that hold fast to Her" (Proverbs 3:18), corresponds to the original Tree of Life from which Adam and Eve were separated when expelled from the garden. This act of initial separation is now cancelled by the Torah which replaces the Tree of Life and becomes the life-giving source which will sustain the people of Israel in the land of Canaan.

See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God . . . then you shall live and multiply and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it (Deuteronomy 30:15-126).

Acceptance or rejection of the commandments becomes the criterion by which God will judge His people.

And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not (Deuteronomy 8:2)

Like the prohibition to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, the Torah commandments are a constant test of Israel's inner readiness to accept the will and authority of God.

According to the Torah, God's pronouncements of punishment are invariably connected to the right of the people to remain in the land. The land of Canaan corresponds to the garden of Eden and constitutes the physical space assigned by God for the fulfillment of human destiny and Divine promise. Both Eden and Canaan belong to God, and the right of habitation and settlement always remains conditional. Israel has no natural claim to the land of Canaan which is the exclusive possession of God, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Leviticus 25:23). Like Adam, an entire people is now "taken" by God and "put" into a land where they are commanded to fulfill a specific purpose. Rejection of God's command leads to expulsion of Adam/Israel from Eden/Canaan. In both instances, separation and exile from the land are the ultimate punishment.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess; you will not live long upon it . . . And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples and you will live few in numbers among the nations where the Lord will drive you (Deuteronomy 4:26-27).

The very description of the land of Canaan as a land "flowing with milk and honey" can be seen as an additional correspondence and counterpoint to the garden of Eden. Like Eden, Canaan is a place of abundance and plenty.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs . . . a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing . . . And you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you (Deuteronomy 8:7-10).

The abundance of Canaan cancels the curse which God had placed on the earth as punishment for Adam's act of disobedience. The earth which was condemned to barrenness and infertility now reverts to its initial state of fruitfulness and productivity. Through the Torah and the land of Canaan, God reaffirms His original blessings of life and prosperity for mankind. This is the essence of the Covenant at Sinai: God will bestow His life-giving blessings on the people of Israel and on the land of Canaan, provided the people remains faithful to God and to His commandments. The Torah, the source of life, and the land of Canaan, the source of prosperity, constitute the basic elements in the ultimate act of Divine-human reconciliation at Sinai.

The Covenant at Sinai is, however, tragically flawed as the initial response of acceptance, "and all the people answered with one voice, and said, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do'" (Exodus 24:3), degenerates into an act of transgression in the incident of the golden calf. Once again, the garden of Eden story sheds light on the events of Sinai: the building of the golden calf, like the eating of the forbidden fruit, is another example of man's never-ending desire to acquire Divinity by exceeding the limits of human, creaturely existence. At Eden, man wished to become like God by elevating himself to a position of Divine importance and authority. At Sinai, the intention is the same, but the direction is reversed. Rather than elevating itself, the people attempts to bring God down to earth by reducing Him to an image created by man. If creature can not become Creator, he can, at least, transform the Creator into an image of creaturely proportions. According to the Bible, this is the ultimate sin: man's constant striving to replace God as the source of supreme authority and power.

Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." You shall remember the Lord our God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

The revelation at Sinai, therefore, contains not only a reaffirmation of God's original blessings to mankind, but also a reenactment of man's initial turning away from God. The events at Sinai reveal the tragic paradox which underlies the Divine-human relationship: man who seeks reunion and reconciliation with God inevitably succumbs to the temptation of separating himself from the Divine center to which he strives to return. Both before and after Sinai, the nature of man remains the same. Neither God's act of destruction (the flood), nor God's act of redemption (Exodus/Sinai) has effected any change in human nature. Man remains caught up in his unwillingness to acknowledge the essential finiteness and

dependence of his being, and in his inclination to achieve a power and security which transcend the limits of human existence. The incident of the golden calf dramatically demonstrates the uneasy truth that reunion and reconciliation with God can not be realized within the framework of existing reality. At the very moment that Moses is receiving the Torah from the Creator God, the people are dancing around the created god! Reconciliation is not a blessing which can be granted by God, but a goal which must be constantly sought after by man — sought after, but not attained, for reconciliation is a matter of anticipation and expectation, not of reality.⁹

The journey of man back to God, therefore, does not end at Sinai, but continues on into history. It has a beginning, Creation, and a middle, Revelation, but no end. The people of Israel leave Sinai covenanted to a God whose message and mission have been revealed in the Torah, which defines the direction and the goal that God has set for His people. Israel can turn away from God and reject His Torah, but it cannot break the bond which was established at Sinai; it can not change the fact that it was created to be God's counterpart in the conveyance of blessing to humanity.

The people leave the scene but not the source of revelation, for the God who revealed Himself at Sinai accompanies them on the journey to the land of promise and fulfillment, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). God and Israel are now inextricably and eternally bound together in Divine-human partnership, the parameters of which were defined in the primeval events of Creation and defection: good and evil, blessing and curse, life and death. The people of Israel depart from Sinai with God's exhortation ringing in their ears:

Choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

This is the essence of God's call to Israel for humanity. Israel's response in history will determine whether the journey which began at Creation will end with Redemption.

9. Perhaps this is the reason why the Pentateuch ends prior to Israel's entering the land of Canaan, thus illustrating how mankind's endless movement towards the goal of fulfillment and reconciliation is always limited by its failure to reach the goal.

Enemies or Jew-Haters? Reflections on the History of Anti-semitism

SAMUEL SCHAFLER

UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF ANTI-semitism is basic to understanding the complexities of Jewish responses to many contemporary and current concerns. Is Jew-hatred an indelible aspect of Christianity and its Scripture or is it the scar tissue of an old hatred that enlightened Christians can surgically remove from the body of Christianity while retaining the basic belief system of classical Christianity? Is racial anti-semitism a new form of Jew-hatred or is it simply a continuation of Christian Jew-hatred under a new name? These questions about the nature of anti-semitism raise issues with profound contemporary resonance and relevance.

How we understand and how we teach the history of anti-semitism provides a crucial litmus-paper test of our Jewish *Weltanschauung* and of our view of the Jewish relationship, historic and contemporary, to the non-Jewish world in general and the world of Christianity and Islam in particular.¹

When, for example, we depict Haman as the archetype of the Jew-hater over the centuries, we are saying, in effect, that Jew-hatred precedes Christianity, that Jew-hatred is independent of the competition with Christianity and the charge of deicide. If we paint Jewish history with — to use Salo Baron's phrase — a lachrymose brush and portray our past as one long seamless and indivisible tale of woe and pain, we are communicating the view that the world has always hated us and will always hate us. If the Egyptians hated us and the Persians hated us and the Greeks hated us and the Romans hated us — and all this before the emergence of Christianity — what does it say about the world and what does it say about us?

If we equate Pharaoh with Hitler, Haman with Torquemada and Antiochus with Chmelnitsky, then we are no longer dealing with history but with a mythic system that blurs and erodes all historic particularities.

This mythic approach to the history of anti-semitism strengthens the widespread Jewish conviction that conflict with Jews is equivalent to conflict with the divine itself. The crudest purveyors of this view are Prager

1. See my article on "Anti-semitism in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* (Spring 1984), an earlier version of this paper.

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and Telushkin in their *Why the Jew?*, which is more theological tract than history. To them the cause of Jew-hatred is simple and inspiring: "The ultimate cause of antisemitism is that which has made Jews Jewish — Judaism is the root cause of antisemitism."² The reviewer of the Prager and Telushkin volume in *Commentary* put it well when she wrote: "Seen through the Prager/Telushkin prism anti-semitism becomes a sinister form of flattery."³

By draining particular events and personalities of their historical specificity, we also weaken our ability to respond effectively to dangers that emerge from new and real enemies. Equations are reversible: if Haman is Hitler then Hitler is Haman, which brings the assumption that since our enemies are alike, the remedies remain the same, an assumption which is both non-sensical and dangerous. But it is an assumption that has frequently crippled the ability of Jewish communities to respond to emerging dangers. If the Czar's police can be bought for vodka or gold, then Jews assume that their latest enemy can be handled in the same way. The incorruptibility of Hitler, the satanic integrity of his Jew-hatred, was a phenomenon which defied the mythic categories through which Jews have historically coped with the hatred of *goyim*.

The traditional view of the recurrent and eternal nature of Jewish history, with its emphasis on *Maaseh Avot Siman L'banim*, "The deeds of the Fathers limn the destiny of their descendants," has provided Jews with a limited response repertoire based on the three-fold strategy of Jacob to the encounter with his brother Esau: *Doron*, *Tefilah*, *Milhamah*, propitiating one's enemy with gifts and bribes, prayer, and confrontation, but only as an ultimate last resort.

Jacob's three-fold response strategy was seen in the world of Jewish tradition as the paradigm for any critical encounter with the *goy*. It was read and studied by Jewish leaders in preparation for their encounters with the actual "Esau" of their day. The Esau of the Bible had been drained of his historic specificity. He was no longer Jacob's twin brother; he was now the mythic archetype of the ominous *goy*.⁴

Has the world always hated us? That is the essential question that must be posed. Have we always been the scapegoats of the world? Has the world always cast its frustrations and hurled its furies at the Jews, irrespective of Jewish behavior?⁵ If we believe that the world hates us any-

2. Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jew?: The Reason for Anti-semitism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 21-22.

3. M. Charen, in her review of *Why the Jews?* in *Commentary* (October, 1983).

4. See the commentary of Rashi on Genesis 32:8 in the English translation of Rosenbaum and Silberman. See, also, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought" by Gerson D. Cohen, in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed., Alexander Altman (Harvard University Press, 1967). It is instructive to note that, in early medieval Christian typology, the Jew is depicted as Esau, who has now been supplanted by his younger brother, Jacob, who, in this typology represents Christianity. (See Gerson Cohen's essay, pages 31-38.)

5. See Hannah Arendt's brilliant analysis of the scapegoat theory in her *Anti-semitism*

way, regardless of what Jews do or do not do, then why not say, “to hell with the world”? Why should we care about what others think of our behavior if their views are tainted with a causeless hatred and polluted with immorality.

There may be a few strong and noble spirits who glory in the nobility of suffering. There are those whose Jewish loyalties are strengthened by their pride in Jewish suffering. But to stress Jewish suffering as a way of strengthening Jewish identity is, in my judgment, less-than-wise. Aside from the fact that the assertion that all the world hates us, always has and always will, is simply not true, it is also pedagogically and psychologically unsound. Most normal men and women do not yearn to be ennobled by suffering or to wear the badge of persecution. Poets may sing of the glory of being among the persecuted rather than among the oppressors, but that is not a widely shared perception.

Harold Schulweiss put it well when he warned:

We will not transmit a Jewish will to live through a fear of death. We cannot frighten our children to life. We cannot build a healthy Jewish identity on the pillars of fear and anger and guilt.⁶

In my judgment, a careful review of the historical record does not support the contention that the world has always hated us. All the world does not hate us, not now and not yesterday. Not everyone is our enemy and not every *goy* is lurking to kill us.

Now, to say that all the world does not hate us does not mean that we do not have many who do hate us and who wish to hurt us, even kill us. But it is crucial here to make a distinction between those we may call “normal enemies” and Jew-haters/anti-semites.

Normal people have normal enemies. Distrust, antagonism, competition, conflict, war — these are, lamentably, the staples of human history, the bitter fruits of human aggressiveness, human frustration and the territorial imperative. Conflict between peoples concerning territory or power is not anti-semitism. Anti-semitism is the extra dimension of irrational hatred that remains even when the particular irritant is resolved. Anti-semitism goes beyond conflict into fantasy. The Jew is not simply wrong; he is not a normal foe or enemy to be defeated. The Jew is the embodiment of evil, the demonic anti-Christ, the eternal other.⁷

In the Bible, Jews are a normal people with normal enemies. They have their own turf and they fight to defend it and expand it. They have allies and they have enemies. They have friends and they have foes. And friends and foes are shifting all the time. Yesterday's enemy is today's ally.

(Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), pp. 5-8.

6. Jewish Telegraphic Agency report of an address by Rabbi Harold Schulweiss at the 51st General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations in Los Angeles.

7. Meyer Weinberg, in his *Because They Were Jews: A History of Anti-Semitism* (Greenwood Press, 1986), p. xii.

Saul is slain by the Philistines and David finds sanctuary with the Philistines.

Even Antiochus, the villain of Hanukkah, is seen by 20th century historians as a "normal enemy" who wishes to unify his kingdom against the growing power of Rome. He proclaims anti-Torah decrees at the urging of his Jewish allies, who include the high priest in the Temple. The Jewish Hellenists use Antiochus to score points in a Jewish civil war.⁸

The Hasmoneans build alliances with Rome and Sparta and they fight to secure the port of Gaza. Access to the sea and trade routes tell us more about Hasmonean state policy than do biblical quotations about *Am levadad yishkon*.⁹ Baalam's vision of a people that dwells alone may be true on a theological level; as a statement about Jewish history it has no validity.

In the Roman empire, until Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the 4th century, Jews were a privileged people, not a persecuted people, so much so that their privileges aroused the ire and the envy of the native population in cities like Alexandria and Antioch. Even during the bloody revolts against Rome, the Roman emperors, with the sole exception of Hadrian, resisted the temptation to vent their frustration against Jews or the Jewish religion and Judaism remained a *religio licita*, a legal religion. The short reign of Hadrian was the exception, perhaps because, as a philosopher, he felt that victory on the battlefield would not subdue the Jews; only uprooting Judaism could do so.

It is possible, as some scholars have done, to assemble impressive lists of anti-Jewish quotations from Greek and Roman authors like Cicero and Tacitus,¹⁰ but these are more than balanced by the thousands of Romans who were drawn to the beauties and purities of Jewish life.

With the advent of Christianity new questions emerge. Is anti-semitism built into the heart of Christianity with the tendentious and malicious defamatory anti-Jewish account of the death of Jesus recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christianity? Does the very core of Christianity contain an ineradicable anti-Jewish element?¹¹

Irrespective of our reply to these critical questions, one irreducible

8. See, particularly, Elias Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979) and his essay, "The Maccabean Uprising: An Interpretation" in *The Jewish Expression*, edited by Judah Goldin (Bantam Books, 1970).

9. Numbers 23:9.

10. See Molly Whitaker, *Jews and Christians: Graeco-Roman Views* (Cambridge University Press, 1984). A re-evaluation of the views of the Roman world and early Christianity towards Jews and Judaism is taking place. See, particularly, John W. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

11. Rosemary Reuther in *Faith and Fratricide* (Seabury Press, 1974) makes a strong case for the contention that anti-semitism is an ineradicable core of Christianity. This crucial issue is explored, comprehensively and sensitively, in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan Davies (Paulist Press, 1979). See also Samuel Sandmel's *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1978).

historical datum must be stressed. The violence and the bloodshed that characterized Jewish-Christian relations in Europe since the Crusades were almost wholly absent from the first millenium of their relationship. Until the Crusades, the Jewish-Christian argument, as Schoeps put it, was largely verbal.¹² Only thereafter does the argument turn from words to weapons, from debates to death. But if Jews and Christians can co-exist — with tensions but largely peacefully for a thousand years, it is hard to assume that Jews and Christians must always be at war.

The truth is that there is no uniform tradition of understanding of the role of Jews and Judaism in classical Christianity. There are essentially three views, each of which surfaces as the face of Christianity at any given time, momentarily submerging the others. But all three views remain embedded in the texts and texture of Christianity as they struggle for hegemony in the world of Christian thought. The first may be called the Paulinian view, and emphasizes that the Gentile is a shoot on a Jewish tree. Salvation emerges from the Jew, and the Torah of the Jews both foreshadows and validates the truths of Christianity. The Jews may be temporarily blind to the truth but they remain The Chosen People and they will some day see the light. The second may be called the Augustinian view and sees the Jews as a witness people. The Torah of the Jews and, particularly, their Talmud are replete with error and folly but they still contain sparks of God's original message to the Jews, who must be kept alive, albeit in a powerless state. Their powerlessness is proof of the cost of ignoring the will of God. The third view, as Jeremy Cohen has shown, is the one developed by the Mendicant Friars of the 13th century, which sees Jewish blindness as wilfull and perverse, stemming from an alliance with the devil. Jews are demonic and their Talmud is the work of the devil, a view which accounts for the burning of the Talmud in the 13th century, an act of cultural vandalism which had not occurred before in the history of the Jewish/Christian polemic.¹³

The venoms of Jew-hatred that were injected into the bloodstream of Christian Europe since the Crusades help us to understand how the Holocaust could have happened. The silent complicity of Christians who had been trained to regard Jews with disgust and hate was the ground upon which Hitler was able to build his factories of death without any hindrance or protest from the Christians of his Reich. Jacob Katz, of the Hebrew University, is not wrong in contending that there is a nexus, a direct

12. Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

13. Jeremy Cohen's study of *The Friars and The Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), is crucial for an understanding of the evolution of the Jewish-Christian conflict. For a careful review of the whole issue of pre-Christian Jew-hatred see J.N. Sevenster, *The Roots of Pagan Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975).

connection, between traditional Christian Jew-hatred and the Holocaust.¹⁴ That is incontrovertible.

The Holocaust took place in Christian Europe and was committed by people who, for the most part, were born, baptized and educated as Christians; it is not an exaggeration at all to say that Christianity is responsible for the *Shoah*. But we dare not ignore the distinction taught us by the late Abraham Joshua Heschel who, in the throes of America's involvement in the bloody *blüte* of Vietnam, warned against indicting all of America by emphasizing that, though all may be responsible, only some are guilty. Christianity may be responsible for preparing the hearts and minds of Christians to accept Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish problem in silence, but only Hitler and his post-Christian pagan murderers are guilty.

As Arthur Hertzberg has shown, it was the anti-Christian neo-pagan philosophers of the enlightenment, led by Voltaire, and the "romantic" reaction that they provoked who are the true fathers of modern anti-semitism. Further evidence comes from Professor Norman Ravitch who wrote:

One can read in Hitler's *Tabletalk* during World War II numerous indications of his having digested a Voltairean anti-clericalism, anti-Christianity and anti-Semitism. Modern anti-semitism owes at least as much to secularism and the destruction of reverence for the biblical tradition as it does to orthodox belief.¹⁵

Christianity, no matter how strongly it may denigrate Judaism and revile the Jew, contains a number of built-in brakes to adopting a Hitlerian "final solution." Jesus was himself a Jew, as were his apostles. His messiahship must be validated as a fulfillment of the prophecies and promises of the Hebrew Bible. Salvation is not only from the Jews, but it cannot be complete without the Jews' embracing the Christian Messiah. There is a core commitment to the concept of a brotherhood of believers to which racialism is antithetical.

It was precisely at the end of the 19th century, when traditional Christianity weakened, that Jews became more vulnerable. The residue of Christian Jew-hatred was still fresh in the hearts and minds of Europeans but the restraints of traditional religion had already eroded and

14. This is the essential thrust of Katz' volume on the history of modern anti-semitism, deliberately titled *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism 1700-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). See also Katz' article, "Misreadings of Anti-Semitism" in *Commentary* (March, 1981). As George Mosse put it in his review of the Katz volume in *Commentary* (December, 1980), Katz' view is that "Modern Anti-Semitism consists of an essentially archaic image covered by layers of contemporary justification." In essence, Jacob Katz would like us to believe that there is no essential difference between traditional Christian Jew-hatred and modern anti-semitism. That is a view that I do not share. In his splendid history of European racism, *Toward the Final Solution* (New York: Fertig, 1978), George Mosse also emphasizes the discontinuities between racial anti-semitism and Christian Jew-hatred.

15. "The Problem of Christian Anti-Semitism" in *Commentary* (April, 1982).

withered. Only in an era when the “thou shalt not’s” of traditional religion have died is everything, including death camps, possible.

The history of Jew-hatred and anti-semitism must be studied with care and scholarly precision and should not be left to the mythmakers of our community. Will scholarship diminish hatred and bigotry? Doubtful. We would do well here to remember the caution of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who reminded us that “the mind of a bigot may be compared to the pupil of an eye; the more light you pour on it the more it contracts.” Understanding the history of anti-semitism will not cure the malady but it may help Jews to cope with its effects with greater effectiveness and wisdom.

Blessed

SARI SLATER

God gave us this sky and
You, who shine with His Light
Walk beneath this sky.
Therefore, it is blessed.

God gave us this air and
You, who speak with His Voice
Breathe this air.
Therefore, it is holy.

I walk under this sky.
I breathe this air.
Tell me:
How came I to be worthy
Of such goodness,
To be thus blessed?

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Jewish Confession as “Normal Mysticism”

ROBERT J. MILCH

THE LITURGY FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS IS made up, in large part, of penitential prayers — confessions for sins of every description, expressions of repentance, pleas to be reconciled with God. Curiously, all of these prayers are couched in the plural rather than the singular form. Thus, whereas the Christian begins his confession with the formula, “Forgive me, for I have sinned,” the Jew, in effect, says, “Forgive us, for we have sinned.”

This communitarian mode of seeking forgiveness is much at variance with the individualistic ethic that characterizes Western society. It seems to be at odds, too, with one of the main teachings of the Judaic tradition, for the animating principle of Western individualism — which holds that each of us is an independent entity with a unique value and importance — ultimately stems from the biblical idea that each human being was purposefully created by God, has a soul, and is responsible for his own acts, that he is to be judged by his maker and accordingly rewarded or punished on some future day of reckoning.

If one takes a sufficiently Olympian stance, stepping back from the parochial sphere so as to see the whole world of religion, past and present, in all of its extraordinary variety, it becomes obvious that Judaism and Christianity are components of a single tradition. They are both derived from the same scriptural writings, they preach, more or less, the same morality, they have the same belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, and they possess the same monotheistic understanding of the deity — and often, as well, the same concomitant intolerance.

All of this being said, and recognizing the common heritage of Judaism and Christianity as an abiding theological and historical reality, it is nonetheless true that the two religions differ in some important respects. From the perspective of the High Holidays, one of the most striking of these differences pertains to their approaches to confession and repentance and, more profoundly, to the underlying notions about man's relationship to God which these reflect.

The fact that Jewish confessions are stated in the plural form has long been noted, of course. The usual explanation is that the Jews are not merely members of a religion in the Western sense of the word; that is to say, we are not simply adherents of a belief system, or what Protestants

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call a religious persuasion. On the contrary, Jews are members of a world-historical community whose rules govern every aspect of our lives and whose boundaries extend across space and time to include all Jews everywhere.

As such, it is said, we Jews have a highly developed group consciousness. Thus, we confess our sins in the plural form, participating in a collective mass confession, because each of us is responsible not only for his own sins but, in some degree, for those of his fellow Jews. To put it differently, by reciting the confessions collectively we speak for the total community as well as for ourselves, showing that the Jewish community as a whole bears some of the responsibility for the transgressions of its members. In addition, the all-inclusive quality of the collective confession, in which we each admit to virtually every sin imaginable and not just those that we have actually committed, provides us with a protective cloak of anonymity, so that no one has to stand up and beat his breast in full view of his friends and neighbors, as in a Maoist self-criticism session.

While this explanation is true and valid as far as it goes, it does not go far enough. It certainly tells us why Jews confess collectively, but it does not explain why Christians confess as individuals. Even if Christians do not constitute a people, in the same sense as do Jews, and, therefore, do not have such a finely honed sense of collective identity and responsibility for each other, there is ample evidence — in the existence of denominational charities, for instance — that Christians do feel some kind of responsibility for their coreligionists. Nonetheless, when it comes to confessing sins, each one stands before God on his own and speaks only for himself.

Some clues to the answer can be found in the realm of literature, for literary works, however idiosyncratic as expressions of personal creativity, provide us with a window into the psyches of other people, and inevitably reflect the innermost concerns and presuppositions of the religio-cultural group to which their authors belong.

Jews, as we all know, are a people of the book, and from earliest times we have expressed our deepest thoughts about God and man in written form. Yet, for all the thousands upon thousands of Jewish writers throughout the ages, there is one branch of literature in which we have produced little, and none of it of substantial distinction — the kind of work that is often referred to as spiritual biography.

Christianity, on the other hand, has produced so many works of this type that it may well be regarded as a characteristic Christian literary genre. Such works were once usually written as first-person narratives of the author's own spiritual struggle. Three that come immediately to mind are the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Life* of St. Teresa of Avila, and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Contemporary Christian writings in this vein are more often rendered as novels, but even though they are, in a certain technical sense, fiction, they draw upon the same

themes as the great autobiographies and are clearly in the same religio-literary tradition. Two outstanding examples are *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos and *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene.

In these works, which are profoundly different from the kinds of religious novels written, say, by an Elie Wiesel or a Chaim Potok, we enter into the mental life of a pious and self-abnegating Christian protagonist. Humble, alone, weak both by worldly standards and in his own eyes, he loves God with all his soul and yearns for God's love and acceptance in return. Rejected and condemned by the very people whom he strives to serve, seeing his occasional successes as failures, consumed by an awareness of his own fragility and sinfulness, he stubbornly persists in his effort to become worthy of God's grace, but comes to see himself as having failed in the only enterprise that matters to him. He dies alone and in despair, but, in the moment of death, achieves at last the redemptive communion with God that he had sought all along — an outcome that is not really surprising, since his spiritual nobility, however much he may be unaware of it, has become increasingly apparent on every page.

No reader with any sense of his own humanness can fail to be moved and inspired by a tale of this kind. One cannot help but admire the protagonist's moral and spiritual heroism, and his unwavering faith despite adversity is something that we can all extol, even though we recognize — or perhaps because we recognize — that it is unattainable by ordinary human beings.

At the same time, there is something here that seems foreign to the Jewish sensibility. From the logic of his own religion's doctrines, the protagonist's conviction that he is unworthy and isolated from God may be warranted, yet a Jew would not be likely to feel that way. Indeed, our own novelists on religious themes rarely touch on such matters. Instead, they deal with questions of an entirely different order: how to reconcile the evil which one has experienced in life with what Judaism teaches about God, or how to be an authentic Jew in the modern world, or whether to be a Jew at all. Their characters wonder whether God is really benevolent and just, or what He wants of them, or whether He cares about the Jews, or even whether He exists, but — and this is the crucial point — they are not generally troubled by a fear that God's welcoming presence may not receive them if they reach out to seek it.

Admittedly, some of Elie Wiesel's characters are made to feel that God has abandoned them, but, however painful, this feeling is entirely different from the harrowing fear that torments the protagonists of the novels by Bernanos and Greene. Living in the totally abnormal conditions of the Holocaust, Wiesel's characters, against their will and despite all that they have been taught, begin to imagine that God has turned His back on the entire Jewish people and, therefore, on them, too, as members of that people. At the same time, they know that, in Judaism, this feeling

is an anomaly, and, as a result, they are eventually able to salvage and even reaffirm something of their former faith. The Christian characters, living in totally normal conditions, and with no reason to doubt the fundamental tenets of their religion, do not feel that God has rejected either all Christians or the human race as a whole. Nonetheless, for reasons intrinsic to the Christian situation, they see themselves, as individuals, in this terrifying state.

The fear of personal rejection by God that agonizes the priest-protagonists of the novels by Bernanos and Greene is what lies at the heart of the difference between the Jewish and Christian modes of confessing sins. Unlike Jews, Christians, at least in theory and theology, are not born into their religion but voluntarily commit themselves to it; they become Christians of their own volition and must stand before God as solitary supplicants asking admission to the community of the elect. God may accept them, but, since nothing is guaranteed, and even if His human votaries have gone ahead and baptized them into the fold, He may also choose not to accept them. Furthermore, even after acceptance into the church, the possibility of divine rejection continues to exist, especially for those who most wholeheartedly accept the challenge of trying to lead a truly Christian life, with all that this means in terms of self-denial, service to others, and unswerving devotion.

Jews, on the other hand, come into their community by birth. Volition and personal fitness have nothing to do with it, and there is an immediate grant of tenure: once you are in you can never be thrown out. And ever after, no matter what a Jew does or fails to do, he stands before God, together with all other Jews, as a full participant in the special relationship that the Jews as a people claim to have with God. Since, from biblical times, this relationship has been described with metaphors drawn from the realm of the family, the Jew stands before God, as it were, as a relative and, if only unconsciously, feels confident that God will not reject him because He cannot reject him, any more than a loving parent can reject a wayward child, even if he also occasionally has to chastise and punish him.

Just as we all know that we can behave abominably toward our parents, children, and spouses and get away with it, because the family bond will not yield and the kinship ties will ultimately mend all, the Jew knows that his family connection with God means that God will never abandon him no matter what he does. Thus the Jew says *we* when he confesses, as if to remind God that he is not a solitary sinner but a member of a community constituted as God's own family.

The Christian, however, has no family ties with God to depend on, no ancient bond of kinship to appeal to. He knows that he is a sinner, for all human beings are sinners, and while he also knows that God can be merciful, he has no reason to assume that God's mercy will automatically be vouchsafed to him, in particular. In consequence, poignantly aware

that he is standing on the edge of a precipice, he comes before God entirely on his own and in his aloneness cries out, "I have sinned," daring to hope that God, by an act of grace, will choose to overlook his failings.

In the burden of responsibility that it places on the individual, Christianity, as compared to Judaism, seems to have a more far-reaching and heroic conception of man's potential, for it demands that he chart his own course through the roiling ocean of life and appear alone before the heavenly tribunal, convinced that he is guilty and uncertain of being pardoned. Indeed, viewed from this angle, Christianity is the heroic epic of antiquity transmuted into the realm of the spirit, with the saint replacing the valorous warrior. Of course, most human beings are not heroes, and, while elitism always has a certain appeal, it does not provide for the countless ordinary folk. Judaism, by contrast, is more egalitarian, but also seems somewhat bourgeois, pursuing an unheroic middle path that encompasses everyone and prudently sealing it all with an irrevocable contract.

The Christian highs, one suspects, may surpass what we know in Judaism, but, then, we also know nothing of the lows, and these, no doubt, are far more frequent. In quite another context, comparing the statutory everyday rituals of Judaism, which are incumbent on every Jew regardless of ability, with the essentially personal exercises engaged in by some of the great medieval Jewish mystics, the halakhic way of life has been described as "normal mysticism," an attempt to make available to everyman that which in other traditions is open only to the spiritual virtuoso.

Perhaps the idea of normal mysticism should be our guide to the inner meaning of our unique method of confessing our shortcomings to our maker. Calling upon Him as one calls upon a parent, secure in the certainty that the call will be answered, we may never stand at the top of a spiritual Mount Everest, but we do not need to.

Israel, Canaan and the Diaspora

Review-Essay by GORDON TUCKER

"Israel: the Ever-Dying People" and Other Essays. Ed. by BENJAMIN C. I. RAVID. Madison, N.J. Fairleigh Dickenson Press, 1986.

Homeland or Holy Land? The "Canaanite" Critique of Israel. By JAMES S. DIAMOND. Bloomington, Ind. Indiana University Press, 1986.

FROM A CERTAIN PERSPECTIVE, DEBATES about the proper hierarchical relationship between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora (or the "Exile") in Jewish life today seem quaint and somewhat anachronistic, throwbacks to an earlier age when ideology was fresh and exciting. Yet, at the same time, thoughtful and sensitive observers of the world Jewish scene today must acknowledge that the substance of those debates is far from irrelevant; indeed, events of recent years almost seem to be conspiring to raise the stakes associated with the ideological struggles of Zionism to the highest (and most dangerous) level that they have ever reached.

That old debates are coming back to haunt — and enlighten — us is well illustrated by two recent books which treat some of the basic problems and dilemmas of Zionism. *"Israel: The Ever-Dying People" and Other Essays*, presents some of the most thoughtful and controversial essays of the editor's father, Simon Rawidowicz (1897-1957), on the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. *Homeland or Holy Land?: The "Canaanite" Critique of Israel*, reviews the thought of Yonatan Ratosh (1909-1981) and his critique of some of the basic historical and religious axioms of Zionism. Both of these volumes might have been received, under other circumstances, as worthwhile contributions to the understanding of movements and tendencies long since put to rest by the subsequent history of the Israeli state. But those are not our circumstances, and the historical record presented in these accounts challenges our thought and our assumptions anew as Israel stands again at one of her many "crossroads." "What is Past is Prologue" reads the inscription outside the National Archives Building in Washington; the two studies before us demonstrate that this aphorism is as true of Zionist history as of American history.

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I

Simon Rawidowicz was born in Lithuania in 1896 and, in many ways, represented the best that the East European Haskalah produced: a man deeply rooted in the Jewish classics, imbued with great national pride, yet, with a strong universalist outlook that never lost sight of the importance of Jewish contributions to world culture and human values generally. He was both a scholar and a publisher of scholarship, and that, in itself, is significant for understanding the man. Learning was not a private matter for him; he believed with great earnestness and zeal that it was critically important for Jews to study Jewish texts in all fields in their original language. He was, in other words, a scholarly activist: his conviction was that the function of learning was not only to document a culture, but, ultimately, to transform it. The subjects which he chose for his scholarship (e.g., Moses Maimonides and Nahman Krochmal) were in many ways paradigms of the quest that he had set for himself, namely, a synthesis of the Jewish past with its present context which would renew a sense of Jewish dignity and continuity. Indeed, continuity, as we shall see, was one of the most important themes in Rawidowicz's thinking and writing throughout his life. In any event, the "present context" of Judaism for Rawidowicz was pre-state Zionism and the ideological debates that raged during those formative decades. With a voice rich in learning and reason, Rawidowicz attempted to transform (in ways to be described below) the cosmopolitan people which was then approaching the brink of a new era in its political and cultural history.

Yonatan Ratosh also participated in those momentous debates. He was a native of Poland (he was born in 1909), but, as Diamond suggests (p. 26), he might just as well have been born in the Land of Israel, for he was raised speaking Hebrew, and only Hebrew. The difference between the Hebraism of Rawidowicz and Ratosh is quite suggestive, and it foreshadows the discreteness of the directions which the thought of these two lovers of Hebrew took. For Rawidowicz, Hebrew was the tongue of the Jews, and it bound that far-flung people together over space and time, making it one. It was a language, among other languages, that a cultured *Jew* in the modern world had to know, and know well. Though he may have valued Yiddish slightly less, it, too, was a language of the Jews, and, as such, a must for those who aspired to understand and be part of the Jewish continuum. Indeed, as Rawidowicz was to discover, strict Hebraism may have had a certain elegance and purity to it, but insofar as Hebrew was not well understood by members of the Diaspora community (and even by many in the *Yishuv*) whom he addressed, it tended to impede the very transformation that he was trying to effect with his words. Ratosh, on the other hand, was, in effect, a child of the land of Hebrew (or more suggestively, the "Land of the Hebrews") who happened to be born abroad. The use of Hebrew was utterly natural to him, and his love of

it was not the love of a man who recognizes it to be a key to cultural development and unity, but, rather, the attachment of a son who loves his parent just because the parent *is*. Similarly, Ratosh and his followers did not love the Land of Israel because of what it had been for the Jews and what it could be for the world. Rather, they loved it because it was there, and because it was theirs. Any other reason was both superfluous and mischievous to them.

Ratosh, who was also an important Hebrew poet, was the principal theoretician and publicist for the ideology known popularly as “Canaanism.” The nickname, though originally intended pejoratively (as it would be understood by anyone who had ever read the Bible), actually captures with accuracy the essence of the perspective that it names. To Jews, even to the Israelites of the Bible, the land lying between the Mediterranean and the Jordan was a land of promise — it was the goal of the wanderings and the dream of exiles because of the possibility of fulfillment and the closeness to God that it held out. The Canaanites, the indigenous inhabitants of that land, presumably needed no such myth of promise and fulfillment to rationalize their hold on their territory. The land was theirs because it was there and because it was theirs. A tautologous answer, to be sure, but, then, only adherents of the “Promised Land” myth ever raise the question which it answers. Canaanites don’t ask it, and don’t need to. This is the insight which underlay Ratosh’s thought.

II

The questions with which both of these books deal are given to us by Diamond on the very first page of *Homeland or Holy Land?*:

- What is the meaning of the State of Israel within the context of Jewish history?
- What is the meaning of the State of Israel within the context of the Middle East?
- What makes Israel a Jewish state?
- What is the nature of Israeli identity?
- What is the relationship between Jewish peoplehood, Jewish nationalism, and Jewish religion?
- What is the relationship between Israel and world Jewry?

Turning to Rawidowicz first, we discover, in the remarkably lucid and persuasive essays gathered and edited by his son, the substance of his answers. The meaning of the State of Israel is what Rawidowicz calls the meaning of “Jerusalem.” It is the goal, the endpoint, the redemption toward which Jewish history leads. The fulfillment of the Zionist goal of a Jewish state is perfectly continuous with Jewish history, which has always been on a march toward redemption. But it is unlikely that any earthly Jerusalem will embody such a perfect redemption. The Diaspora (referred to by Rawidowicz with the term “Babylon,” which recalls the great centers of Jewish learning outside of the Land of Israel) has been, and

continues to be, the principal locus of the *road* toward redemption, of the endless process of living a Jewish life and advancing Jewish culture. Thus we have, in Rawidowicz's own favorite phrase, "Babylon-and-Jerusalem," a historical continuum. And, thus, the relationship of the State of Israel to Jewish history is that of a missing piece of a continuum which has reappeared to take its rightful (but not monopolistic) place in the Jewish heart and consciousness. That, too, is what make Israel a Jewish state. It was founded by Jews not only to be a haven for their brothers and sisters (though that is of the greatest importance), but also because a Jewish Land of Israel is an inseparable part of the millennia-old fabric of Judaism. The State of Israel symbolizes and celebrates the plenitude of Judaism, a culture which cannot be contained in one time or place (be it the Land of Israel or the Diaspora), nor cast into one set of ideas.

This idea of cultural plenitude, the plasticity of the Jewish civilization, animates much of Rawidowicz's writings, and his answers to the enormously complex questions given above become mere corollaries to it. To be an Israeli Jew is no more complicated, as a question of identity, than to be a British Jew. It means that you are a Jew living in the Land of Israel, and subject to its laws. Certainly, there is the added element that such a Jew's land more thoroughly pervades Jewish history than does that of the British Jew (for there have, after all, been many Babylons, while there is only one Jerusalem). But the *Jewishness* of the Israeli Jew is no different in kind from the Jewishness of any Diaspora Jew. And with respect to non-Jewish citizens of Israel, the Israeli Jew has less of ultimate importance in common with such a person than he does with the Jew of the Diaspora. Zionism is a natural, organic part of Judaism, but it does not exhaust it. To use Rawidowicz's own phrases again, Zionism represents, or points to, the end of Jewish strivings, but Judaism, i.e., the striving itself, is endless. Jewish nationalism is not alien to Jewish religion, or vice versa:

Every attempt at reform in Israel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that sought to determine the essence of Judaism ended in seeing only one tree of the forest, one part of the whole: the part labeled "religion" (to the extent that this might be acceptable to the "enlightened" Jew of twentieth-century Europe or America), or the part labeled "nationality" (to the extent that this might be acceptable to the Jewish citizen of Europe and America). This is the result of an attempt to create an abridged, part-time Judaism, the product of a coming to terms with the transformation of Judaism from a life-embracing reality to an activity limited to an hour a week or a few days a year. Yet, some more than came to terms with this transformation; they embraced it, and encouraged it, and envisioned it as the very redemption of Israel. They "devote" their one hour to Judaism, but not a speck of it appears in their activities the remainder of the week. Such are the apostles of a new age, who are totally unaware that the gospel they preach is long out-moded (*Israel: The Ever-Dying People*, p. 233).

And, finally, Rawidowicz's answer to the question of the relationship of the State of Israel to world Jewry follows with equal ease and force. The

Land of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora are as two foci of an ellipse (the scholar's famous counter to the circle metaphor of Aḥad Ha'am), they are "Two That Are One" (the title of one of the essays in the volume), neither enjoying hegemony over the other, but always coexisting and complementing one another. Or, put perhaps most strikingly:

... we do not want the State of Israel to have one bit less sovereignty than other states in regard to external affairs; however, as regards to relations with other Jewish communities, the State of Israel must not, and should not, be sovereign. In this realm, the State of Israel is part of the people of Israel (*Israel: The Ever-Dying People*, p. 177).

Yonatan Ratosh would have considered these answers, particularly the last-quoted passage, to be hopelessly confused. How can a state be sovereign with respect to its neighbor states, but not with respect to a religious group scattered around the world? Can a state be both a full voting member of the United Nations and at the same time beholden to a World Zionist Organization? Who is in charge here, and what is the real purpose and nature of this state in what was once the Land of Canaan?

Different, indeed, were the answers given by Ratosh and Canaanism to the basic questions about the relationship of Judaism to Zionism, and the relationship of Jews to Israelis. In brief, they claimed that, for all its manifest secularism, Zionism really amounted to the same thing as Jewish religion. Jewish religion was based on timeless, transportable, ethical abstractions, and believed in a transcendent power that would bring about redemption, or a messianic age. Zionism had merely secularized these features in order to enable Jews of the modern era to have their own form of nationalism. Worse, and mostly for pragmatic reasons, Zionism had compromised with, and incorporated, overtly religious elements. It had, therefore, effected no change in the essential nature of of Judaism — it merely added to it the possibility of fulfilling something that looked to the world (and to Jews) like national aspirations. Since (according to this perspective) the natural home of Judaism is the Diaspora, Ratosh then reached and articulated the startling conclusion that Zionism is, at bottom, a Diaspora phenomenon. It cannot found a true nation in the Land of Israel; it can only extend the Jewish Diaspora into that land. In that sense, the State of Israel, as it was founded in 1948, is, indeed, continuous with all of Jewish history, but it *ought not to be*. What Israel should be is a radical, decisive break with Jewish history, so much so that Jews and citizens of the ideal Israeli state (known in Canaanite jargon as "Hebrews") should have nothing in common:

The Hebrew did not return to his land in order to be a Jew (*Homeland or Holy Land*, p. 36, quoting Yaakov Shavit).

Israeli identity (i.e., "Hebrew" identity) should be an entirely new one, formed out of natives (Jewish and non-Jewish) of the region and immigrants (like Ratosh himself!) who are willing to break with their past to

create a new, secular nation. The relationship between the state envisioned by the Canaanites on the one hand, and world Jewry on the other, is no relationship at all, and the new Hebrew of Jewish extraction will have far more in common with a Druze or a Maronite Christian (who are envisioned as accepting Hebrew nationality and the Hebrew language) than he will with a Jewish man or woman in London, Los Angeles, or even Iran.

One could hardly find two more different approaches to Judaism, Zionism, and the relationship between them than those represented by these two men. One of them (Rawidowicz) considers it a serious mistake to perceive periods and discontinuities in Jewish history:

... he urged Jewish scholarship to remove the barriers it often erected between various times and places, and to join them together and seek the continuity, the underlying essence that assumed different forms in different periods of Jewish existence (*Israel: The Ever-Dying People*, p. 38).

Ratosh, on the other hand, considered a radical break to be essential. Continuity was, for him, a condemnation to an endless wandering without a home. If, for Rawidowicz, the State of Israel and the Diaspora were as two foci of an ellipse, for Ratosh they existed on two entirely different planes, never intersecting or affecting one another.

III

We have begun to see how different were some of the specific views held by the two subjects of the books under discussion here. In fact, the thought processes and assumptions of these two men were quite different in more general ways as well. For one thing, as we have just seen, Rawidowicz believed generally in continuity in human affairs, and felt that discerning or advocating radical breaks was contrary to the natural course of events. Perhaps this is to be expected from a scholar who busied himself, in part, with the philosophy of history, for the discipline of history itself is built largely on postulates about continuity and uniformity. Ratosh, who was, after all, a poet, had perhaps a more romantic view of human affairs, which sought out and discerned bold, radical departures and new creations of spirit. Indeed, Rawidowicz, like some of the subjects of his scholarship (e.g., Maimonides), was a rationalist, and as such eschewed irrational, mystical elements that he discerned in various thought currents of his day. For example, on the concept of *galut* (exile), Rawidowicz complains that it has become a catch-all phrase of contempt used equally by diametrically opposed sides in virtually any debate about Zionist policy. Worse, though, this misuse of the concept invests a reality of Jewish life with a magical, demonic force that it simply does not have:

... we reduce all of our failings, both personal and collective ... to a single factor, *galut*. I certainly do not deny its dark sides, but when it becomes the scapegoat for everything, I maintain that this leads to a great weakening of

the natural drive for self-defense on the part of Jews in the Diaspora. This paralyzes the last impulse of our “natural good drive” to organize and re-construct our reality. It reinforces our dependence and apathy.

On the other hand, this attitude not only condemns *galut* to the deepest recesses of dark hell, but also elevates the Land of Israel to a high level of light that no mortal or community of mortals is able to sustain (*Israel: The Ever-Dying People*, pp. 113-114).

There is, in other words, a mystical view about the positive powers of the Land of Israel that is as repugnant, intellectually and pragmatically, to Rawidowicz as is the correlative mystique about the negativity of the Diaspora. The alleged inevitability of the negative influence of the *galut* is no more real than is the corruption symbolized by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, the supposed automatic positive power of the Land of Israel is, in reality, as mythical as that of the Tree of Life.

Thus does a particularly crude form of the often-used concept of *shelilat hagolah* (negation of the Diaspora) yield to the rational analysis of the scholar (Rawidowicz was to argue against the less crude forms as well). Yet, Ratosh, one of the most vociferous proponents of *shelilat hagolah*, ascribed such potent, quasi-magical powers to the Land of Israel that he insisted that it would be able to revive a “Hebrew” spirit that had supposedly lain dormant for at least 2500 years and simultaneously to erase two and a half millennia of “Jewish” consciousness, nurtured by the Diaspora, which he regards as a wholly negative creation.

Yet, for all of their differences, Rawidowicz and Ratosh had some strange, but significant, commonalities. Perhaps most striking among these is the fact that both understood that Jewish religion stands, in a certain sense, in irreducible opposition to the centrality of the land. For Ratosh, this was a perfectly straightforward observation: the Jewish religion was, for him, a creation of the first exile, and, over the long centuries, it had evolved and adapted itself to the Diaspora. It cannot, therefore, be part of a movement to reclaim the land on a purely nationalistic basis. But Rawidowicz, too, understood the opposition here, though in a different way. In “Sanctity, Praise, and Deprecation” (presented in this volume of essays) he observes that the sanctity of God, so central to the Jewish religion, is a powerful competitor to the idea of the sanctity of the land, for the sanctity of God can, in principle, manifest itself outside of the land as well. This was not an innovation of Rawidowicz, for it was, after all, the interpretation of Jewish religion given by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And even the Pentateuch itself contained the idea, implied strongly by the *portable* sanctuary, that sanctity was determined by God’s presence and not by a fixed, particular region of space.

Rawidowicz, of course, felt that this opposition was a healthy one, and that Judaism, and, in fact, Zionism, could and did thrive on the tension between the opposing elements of religion and nationalism. Ratosh, for his part, believed that there was nothing more unhealthy for a nation

than such a contradiction in its basic identity, and, thus, religion (i.e., Judaism) had to be exorcised. But both understood the opposition. Both understood that there was a supernatural element in Zionism, though it might have been secularized in intellectually tortured ways. And both frankly admitted that Zionism, therefore, rests on ambiguities and paradoxes. Because of this commonality, these two diverse theoreticians of Zionism (if Ratosh may so be designated) unite to urge us to deal with some of the most important questions which get to the very heart of Zionism and its future.

Much of the malaise afflicting Israeli society today is closely connected to these paradoxes. Whether it be the "religious wars" which loom at the front separating the Orthodox from the secular sectors, or the controversies surrounding foreign policy, or ambivalences about relations with the United States, or the increase in emigration, the problems besetting Israeli leaders today stem, in large part, from confusions about what Israel is, or should be. Is it a haven, a homeland, for Jews, or a messianic force? Is it a secular democratic state, or a government so entangled with religion that theocracy always threatens? If it is intended to normalize the position of Jews in the world, why is Israel as problematic in the family of nations as individual Jews have been in the Diaspora societies?

The issues here are: Israel and the Diaspora, religion and state, and Israel's relations with other nations. A consideration of the work of Ratosh and Rawidowicz gets us to focus on these. Rawidowicz, as we shall suggest, gives some answers that may well make good sense today, thirty years after his death. Ratosh, on the other hand, though there are some obvious problems with his assumptions, also raises critical questions and challenges that we would do well to heed.

IV

A profound rationalism and ethical sense dominate the thought and works of Simon Rawidowicz, and they produced the convictions and insights that shed light on the knotty problems facing present-day Israel. We have already seen some of what he had to say about the relationship between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. Most generally, he maintained that all hierarchies in relationships among parts of a whole were destructive. That which is more highly valued will not only overshadow, but will eventually eclipse and destroy, through passivity and atrophy, the part less highly valued. If we do not recognize the reality of the Diaspora as being on an equal footing in Jewish life with that of the Land of Israel, the Diaspora communities will lose their will to create as Jews, and the end result will be that the Jewish community will lose one of its precious limbs. The Diaspora is a fact with a long and distinguished history, and it must have its own positive ideology which parallels the ideology of the community in the Land of Israel. In this connection, Rawidowicz's uni-

versalism and ethical impulses stand out in a striking way, for he claimed that national rights themselves are not primary, but, rather, are derivative of human rights, the rights which alone unite all of humanity. In other words, a nation is justified not by its sovereignty and its hold on territory, but, rather, by the morality on which it is based. And, by the canons of human rights, Jews, like anyone else, have the inalienable right to live and create anywhere in the world. Territory is, in other words, not a *sine qua non* for corporate identity or creativity.

So Rawidowicz clearly opposed himself to the sentiments of Psalm 137, which not only claimed that God's melodies could not be sung or played outside of the Land of Israel, but actually prayed for an atrophy of any tongue or hand that would attempt to sing or play such a song. The Diaspora was, and is, a full and dignified partner in the combined Jewish destiny. Here we have Rawidowicz's answer to the contemporary contention that, for all of Israel's vexing problems, the Diaspora may not intervene with its opinions and convictions concerning them. He maintains that both Israel and the Diaspora have the right and the duty to criticize each other. Clarity and wisdom of this kind is not often heard in current discussions of this matter, though it certainly would not hurt.

Rawidowicz did not dwell to a great extent on religion directly, though he did, as noted earlier, insist that both religion and nationality were inseparable parts of the Jewish culture and consciousness. The major issue of religion and state is, however, addressed in a very profound way by a subject he often treated, notably in his essay "*Libertas Differendi*," intended as an argument for a fifth freedom (augmenting Franklin Roosevelt's list): the freedom to be different. Rawidowicz gives us a persuasive and sophisticated argument for pluralism within a society, and it is essentially this: if you believe in the fundamental unity of humanity, which is the basis for convictions about human rights, you must believe in the right of the individual to be an individual, that is, to be different. In a Jewish context, and particularly in a Jewish religious context, this has an especially strong appeal. It recalls the famous Mishnah in Tractate *Sanhedrin* which points up a fundamental duality in human nature — we are all created from one mold (i.e., we are naturally, and by right, different from one another). So Rawidowicz conjures up the reasoning of the Mishnah itself, in the most basic human context, to remind us that a society which does not recognize the right of persons to their own convictions and their own ways of expressing those beliefs and convictions, has betrayed the fundamental moral premise concerning the unity of humankind. No more trenchant argument could today be brought to point up the inherent contradiction in the kind of coercion practised today in the State of Israel in the name of religion.

Rawidowicz also conceived of the Diaspora and the Land of Israel in paradigmatic terms: the Diaspora represents the "endless," the road toward fulfillment, paved with eternal values of the culture, while the

Land of Israel represents the equally legitimate and necessary yearning of a people for an end to the road. It was the dialectic that he found fructifying and edifying, and so he warned against negation of the Diaspora in this sense as well;

The conception of the end . . . the idea that in the war in the Land of Israel for the Land of Israel against the enemy who claims "all is mine" the final end can come at once, is no less dangerous from the perspective of the Land of Israel itself . . .

I am warning . . . against an exaggerated faith in force and in the decisiveness of force, against the enthusiasm in the strength to give a blow that serious thinkers and historians among us regard as the greatest achievement of the "end-movement," as the turning point of Jewish history . . . [E]ven when successful, force is no more than a means of winning time to prepare for an atmosphere of coexistence with friend and foe . . . Isaiah's prophecy that "Zion shall be redeemed by justice" was not just a catch-phrase . . . Justice is, on a deeper level, one of the symbols of the endless, the infinite. In sum, I am warning primarily against an end-psychosis that can become a very great danger to Jewish existence (*Israel: The Ever-Dying People*, pp. 84-87).

Rawidowicz died in 1957, long before the occupation of territories and even longer before the growth of such messianic organizations as *Gush Emunim*. Still, in the light of the difficulties that Israel faces in its territories and in its foreign affairs, this stern warning against an "end-psychosis" has a prophetic ring. It need hardly be added that the fact that it has been heard many times since, though perhaps not so eloquently, does not make it any less wise or true.

V

What Diamond terms the "shrill" voice of Yonatan Ratosh contrasts sharply with the calm, reasoned voice of Simon Rawidowicz. More to the point, there are some troubling difficulties with Ratosh's "Canaanite" ideology, which are perhaps most accurately reflected in that ideology's utter failure as a movement. One of these is certainly the apparent amorality of the ideology, and of the conception of the grounds on which a nation should aspire to build itself. For example, we are told that Ratosh's comments in the aftermath of the 1967 war (in particular, the failure to annex all of the territories immediately) were that the "religio-ethical interests" *unfortunately* prevailed. This point of view, which is typical of Ratosh's views, contrasts pointedly with Rawidowicz's ethical basis for nationhood that was remarked upon earlier.

Most of all, the Canaanite point of view seems to fail because it is based on an obliviousness to reality. In particular, the wedge that is driven in this point of view between Judaism and Zionism, on the one hand, and an authentic return to sovereignty in the Land of Israel on the other, fails to take account of the fact that it was Judaism, and nothing else, which kept the idea of a return alive, and the attachment to the Land of Israel

alive, and that made possible the formation of a consciousness such as that possessed by Yonatan Ratosh. Diamond hits this fatal flaw on the head when he notes (p. 57) that national identity is, at bottom, a social phenomenon. Objective definitions of nations that include certain approved kinds of groups (e.g., “natives” such as “Hebrews”) and exclude others (e.g., cosmopolitan faith groups such as Jews) are invalid and self-defeating. Ratosh’s mistake, says Diamond, is that he substituted a private and an *a priori* construction of what constitutes a nation for a social one. The history of Zionism itself, which did forge a national feeling among this cosmopolitan group, proves the misguided nature of Ratosh’s analysis. This error was compounded by the two clearly mistaken notions: that Judaism was a wholly extraterritorial religion, and that a nation must be inseparably related to its soil.

Diamond suggests, in the light of these fairly obvious flaws in the “Canaanite” reasoning, that what Ratosh and his followers were really doing was rebelling against the admixture of religion and religious elements in Zionism. The romance about an ancient Hebrew culture that was to be revived and expanded, speculates Diamond, may have been simply a romance that adorned a more down-to-earth agenda: not the defeat of Zionism, but the purging of the religious elements from it. There is no doubt that Ratosh did seek a secular state. Indeed, an important insight of this book is that people like Ratosh and the *Neturei Karta* have an important thing in common: they both insist that secular nationalism and religion should have nothing to do with one another. Both understand the inherent ambiguity in Zionism as it developed and as it forged political compromises. These are the ambiguities that surface in every vote in the Knesset on religious matters, such as the validity of conversions to Judaism. Secularists vote with religious parties for reasons having nothing to do with views on religion, and Arabs and communist members may theoretically go either way and thus determine the issue. Is this not a ridiculous ambiguity in what Zionism is about, and is it not the result of the mischievous admixture of religion and nationalism? Rawidowicz reminded us that religion and nationalism are both elements of the Jewish culture. Ratosh and Diamond, who interprets him, remind us that the way in which Zionism and Israeli political parties chose to effect that integration is both wrong-headed and dangerous.

Diamond seizes upon this point in order to spin out an “excursus” at the end of his book, in which he argues for the separation of religion and state in Israel. There is much to be said for this view, I believe, and Diamond makes a reasonable case here. Yet, there are two problems with this “excursus.” The first is that, in an otherwise very well-documented book, the connection between the religion-state argument and Ratosh’s own tendencies is based largely on speculation about the seriousness, or the lack thereof, of the “Hebrew” culture which figured so prominently in “Canaanite” thought. The second problem is that, in a way, the excursus

is a bit unrelated to the rest of the volume; more precisely, the volume itself, for all of its scholarship and fascinating information, seems to have been an excuse for the author to present his religion-state argument. That argument has its own cogency, and it can be made persuasively without reference to the Canaanites or Yonatan Ratosh.

This fascinating historical figure does, however, as suggested earlier, raise some critical questions and challenges for us. For the fact remains that there is a very basic confusion and doubt to this day about what is the primary nature of the state. Is it a democratic homeland for Jews, or a Jewish holy land? If both, which is primary? That is, which will we sacrifice first if circumstances do not allow the maintenance of both? One of the most terrifying things that strikes any lover of Israel today is the possibility that there is at least a kernel of truth in what Meir Kahane says, that is, that there may be imaginable circumstance under which we may not be able to maintain both democracy and Jewishness in Israel with the intensity and force that we would like. Only if one has gone through the kind of critique that Ratosh's ideology included can one recognize fully the tragic implications of the question. And only if one has done that can one begin to formulate sensible, and moral, answers. Clarity is no god to be worshipped, but neither is perpetual ambiguity a special virtue, particularly when the stakes, internally and externally, are so high.

VI

For all of the reasons given above, and more, these two volumes are well worth reading, and reading together. Above all, they are well worth considering. They are filled with many other fascinating pieces of intellectual history, such as Rawidowicz's pointed correspondence with Ben-Gurion concerning the former's objection to the name "Israel" for the Jewish state (it thereby excluded the Diaspora from the category of Israel), and the influence of "Canaanism" on Hebrew literature. The Rawidowicz volume contains several papers which were first published in this journal, and others which have been translated specially for the present volume. The translations, done from Hebrew by Benjamin Ravid, and from Yiddish by Michael Stanislawski and Stephen Simons, generally read very well. Together, the essays convey an impressive image of a significant scholar and human being. Diamond's book, despite some annoying typographical errors (at one point, even Ratosh's name is misspelled!) is also well written and clearly argued. The author, in a discussion of Gershon Weiler's *Jewish Theocracy*, gives perhaps too much credence to the notion that the halakhic system of Judaism is totally incompatible with a modern nation-state, principally because the *halakhah* allegedly recognizes only the authority "of God and those who interpret God's Torah." Although this is related to some of the major concerns noted above, full discussion of this controversial point cannot be made here. But Diamond has introduced the general reader to an important critical view of the career of Zionism. In so doing he has highlighted for us questions that may never fully be answered, but which we must not fail to ask.

REVIEWS

German History Explained

Dreams and Delusions; the Drama of German History. By FRITZ STERN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. 323 pp. \$19.95.

Reviewed by LOTHAR KAHN

IN MAY OF 1933, ALBERT EINSTEIN wrote a letter full of compassion to Fritz Haber, a fellow Nobel laureate who had confessed his decline and misery in exile. "I can imagine your inner conflict," Einstein wrote. "It is as if one must give up a theory which one had worked on all one's life. It is not the same for me because I never believed in it in the least." The theory that Einstein referred to related to their respective images of Germany and their resulting attitudes. Whereas Einstein was skeptical, not only about German cultural emphases and political directions and, in 1914, was one of the few German intellectuals who did not sign the declaration of support for the war, the chemist, Fritz Haber, had hurled himself wholeheartedly into the melee. He not only believed in Germany's destiny and special mission, but he acted accordingly. Like Rathenau, he put his special talents at the service of the Kaiser's war effort and attained the dubious distinction of developing German chemical warfare. He received the Nobel Prize for Physical Chemistry in 1918. Though he had converted to Protestantism at the age of twenty-four, in 1933 he was forced into exile when he courageously refused to discharge Jewish scientists in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute which he had been heading for decades.

What Fritz Haber had in common with the bulk of Germans and German Jews was a motley collec-

tion of both dreams and delusions. The Germans, Stern makes abundantly clear, suffered from serious misperceptions: of reality, of their role, and their potential, the nature of their enemies, both real or imagined. Whereas the French and British had achieved an appreciable measure of political maturity, the Germans, who were late in achieving national unity, were seriously deficient in this quality. They rejected Western democratic emphases, despising parliamentarianism, Liberalism, materialism, pragmatism and realism. Instead, their own brand of idealism, which excluded all of the above, apotheosized a maudlin sentimentalism and a view of themselves as the genuine carriers of civilization. They saw themselves apart from Western democratic emphases on the one side and Eastern despotism on the other, so they imagined their values to be surrounded by enemies and danger. Not all enemies however, were external; some, within, were the Jews.

The Jews harbored their own rich collection of misperceptions. Their remarkable progress on German soil, unparalleled anywhere else, according to Stern, caused them to overestimate their sense of acceptance, even as they were never allowed to forget their fringe status. But their progress, beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century and ending only with the accession of Hitler, was so astounding that their sense of being firmly entrenched, and with a solid future before them, was a forgivable error. Stern agrees with Gerson Cohen, who, not very long ago, stated that German Jews had "had a bad press" in America. Stern defends them, their achievements, their determination to maintain a degree of Jewishness, and to assert themselves as Jews, even though this was not always fashionable or safe.

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Many historians, and certainly the general public, have viewed both Germany and the history of the Jew in Germany from the vantage of 1945. The relationship between German and Jew in the years before then was not — and this transcends mere revisionism — a history of unrelieved bleakness and failure. To be sure, what there was of progress and confidence was frequently accompanied by reservations on the German side, and often by outright hostility.

At any time in the century before Hitler (Stern claims), German Jews could look back and be astounded by the progress they had made, or look abroad and see how much better off they were than most of their fellow Jews in other countries. It was tempting to extrapolate from past success to future success; by and large, German Jewry assumed a continuity of progress, even without any comparative solace.

Stern claims further that most German Jews found Germany a congenial and “life-enhancing home.” They *felt* (Stern’s italics) German and unproblematically embraced the German ethos and the daily rhythm of life. They felt at home and safe, he claims, with whatever lingering ambivalence.

Known as he is for two highly acclaimed previous books, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* and *Gold and Iron*, the latter being the story of the German banker, Bleichroeder, and his relationship to Bismarck, Stern may be overstating the sense of safety of most German Jews. The bankers, economic barons and others with whom he had mainly dealt, may, indeed, have sensed a security and well-being that belied the tragedies to come. But in the case of some one hundred German cultural figures whom I have studied during the past decade, I came up with conclusions that do not

necessarily invalidate Stern’s, but put at least a half a question mark after them. How can we explain, for example, the hostility felt by the earliest nineteenth-century writers, not necessarily geniuses like Heine, but more modest talents, who were closer to the multitude of men? How are we to explain their need to emigrate, to all intents and purposes, to nearby France? How is it that, even between 1840 and 1870, a period of relative tranquility for Jews in Germany, many of them opted to live in France, rather than in the German states? In a few instances, such a choice was not involuntary, as the writers were hounded by the authorities for “irreverent writings.” It can also be argued that writers are forever seeking experience that they can transform into creative works. But this does not explain the length of the foreign sojourns, or the numbers of people choosing Paris or Italy as a permanent residence. It is no less difficult to interpret the sad exclamation of that ultimate assimilationist, Berthold Auerbach, near the close of his life, that all had been in vain. What about the *Antisemitentreib* in the latter decades of the past century? Were not many writers forced into a defensive stance that led them to interiorize the prejudices about them and indulge in public self-deprecation, if not of self-hate?

In fact, except for relatively brief periods, anti-Semitism was a fairly widely sanctioned constant on the German scene. Professor Stern is totally aware of this fact and even attributes to its existence the failure of Jews to perceive the real danger of Nazism. As he tells us, many German Jews were so accustomed to anti-Semitic slurs and attacks on Jews that they looked upon the Nazi variety as only a more noxious version of the old disease. They had always lived, at least passably, in the midst of Jew-hate. So what if

it were to be a little worse? Moreover, once Hitler was in power, he would act more responsibly and the need for excesses would subside.

While Professor Stern views the progress and safety of Jews in Germany through mildly rose-colored historical glasses — which, however, did not significantly distort his vision — he is more completely sound than any commentator to date on the rise and “temptation” of Hitler. This is not to say that he contributes many new insights, but he amalgamates old ones more successfully and with remarkable balance. The perspective of 1945 has made us forget that entirely decent Germans were persuaded to sympathize with the Nazi cause. To be sure, these people did not condone his rabid anti-Semitism, but, like the Jews, they thought of it at first, and even later, as an aberration that would be removed or as an evil that had to be accepted along with the many good things the Nazis were promising to do or had already done. Their very self-confidence and their decisiveness were welcome departures from the endless economic, political, psychological-moral-social uncertainties and failures of democratic Weimar. Stern is especially concerned with the appeal of Hitler to the German elite, the professors, scientists, clergymen, even the now debt-ridden nobility of old. He accepts Thomas Mann’s appraisal that the German does not want to think in economic or political terms. Instead, he thinks “tragically, mythically, heroically.” Stern examines at some length this irrational-mythical streak and, indeed, the temptation of Hitlerism can be traced back, in measure, to this “dream and delusion” approach.

The clergy were partly deluded by Hitler’s sly wrapping of his early pronouncements in Christian garb.

Lutherans, especially, had a dogmatic belief that obedience to the state was a divinely ordained command. To be sure, there was friction with the Churches and with specific clergymen over such issues as the treatment of Jewish converts to Christianity and the racial-pagan approach that became increasingly perceptible.

But, above all, Hitler was the master of the mixed signal. He used the carrot and the stick more skillfully than had any politician before him. He encouraged illusions until the time came to crush those cherishing them. He reassured doubters and skeptics until the need for reassurance had disappeared. He would then pounce on a foe who was ready to fall and insure that he would fall. He sensed the need for the irrational, the “heroic,” the demonic, that formed part of the German subconscious. He intuited the mixtures of arrogance and anxiety and resolved the conflict by giving the Germans a new national identity. The Jews had become the epitome of the hateful object, so their extrusion from German life helped restore the nostalgia for lost traditions. Considering the benefits that the Nazis could bestow, the return of authority, even of absolute authority, became a *summum bonum* in German life.

By correcting, though perhaps overcorrecting, the image of the Jew in Germany, by providing a needed balance in explaining the seemingly inexplicable triumph of the Nazis, Professor Stern has provided a much needed intellectual service. This book constitutes history at its best and most valuable, especially in the Introduction, the units on Einstein and Haber, “The Burden of Success: Reflections on German Jewry,” and two chapters on “Nazism in 1933” and the “Temptation of Nazism.” These parts of this dazzlingly brilliant book are of special significance to the American Jew.

Recent Zionist History

A History of Israel: From the Aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. Vol II. By HOWARD M. SACHAR. New York: Oxford University Press. 1987, 319 pp. \$19.95.

The Zionist Dream Revisited. By AMNON RUBINSTEIN. New York: Schocken Books. 204 pp. \$8.75 (paper).

Reviewed by AMOS PERLMUTTER

HOWARD SACHAR IS NO stranger to the middle east, having written many books on Middle Eastern diplomatic history. His current effort, *A History of Israel: From the Aftermath of the Yom Kippur War* is not a sequel to his earlier *A History of Israel*, but, rather, an enlargement of its last section, bringing it up to date in greater detail.

Detail is Sachar's forte. He is a grand master of it but his style is monotonous as he offers the reader a wealth of details and facts in the process of retelling the familiar. He seems totally bereft of any analytical or historical perspective. He is a narrative historian.

This type of history is full of hazards. Either you end up writing ten volumes on a particular subject, or you end up selecting what one would think are key issues, key decisions, key events or persons around which to bind a historical narrative.

Sachar does identify key events — such as the Yom Kippur War, the occupation, the rise of radical nationalist and religious fundamentalists, as well as the War in Lebanon — but he presents these events and issues as narrations, not as crucial signposts in Israeli history. What is missing is analysis of

causality, the "why" of things. Instead, he shows what happened without any causal link to why it happened, depriving his narrative of historical meaning. Thus, whatever interpretation Sachar brings to his book is not governed by a rigorous historical method. The result is both a tedious amassing of details and a tendentious and ideologically oriented polemic masquerading as history. His methodological tools, such as they are, are totally abandoned when he takes on Begin, Sharon and Israel's nationalist militants, both secular and orthodox.

To understand Sachar's method, a brief but illuminating example will suffice. He introduces Zeev Jabotinsky, the guiding light and founding father of Revisionist Zionism thus: "As a journalist in Rome, Jabotinsky had been impressed by Mussolini's bravura oratory, which he had adopted even as Begin later adopted Jabotinsky's" (p. 26).

Immediately, Jabotinsky is somehow implicated with Mussolini's fascism and, indirectly, fascism in general, without a shred of proof. His equally impassioned follower and orator, Menachem Begin, is also linked to Mussolini and to fascism, the reference to "Begin's tearful, semi-coherent defense of his position on Etzel Radio" (p. 27), in connection with the Altalena affair.

Sachar is equally spurious when he says that Likud's 1977 electoral victory was linked to Labor's decline because of its loss of "Arabs affiliated with Labor." This is not news; it is nonsense. Sachar himself acknowledges that Yadin's *Dash* victory "played a decisive role in the political upheaval of 1977" (p. 22).

The rest of the book is a vendetta against Begin and the War in Lebanon. After 1973 and, certainly, 1977, Israel was no longer the

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Labor-dominated, historically partitioned state and polity of yesterday. There was, indeed, a serious shift to the center-right in electoral politics as well as to radical nationalism, both secular and orthodox. yet Sachar fails to show us why and fails to take advantage of such fresh studies as that of Professor Ehud Sprintzak and others, who examined the causes and motivations of the rise of *Gush Emunim* and *Hatehiyyah Party*. The approach is inflammatory without being enlightened, as seen in the title of the chapter on Begin: "Begin II: The Djinn Out of the Bottle."

On the other hand, one of the best analyses of the emergence of Israel's radical nationalist movement is Amnon Rubinstein's *The Zionist Dream Revisited*, which was first published in Hebrew under the title, *From Herzl to Gush Emunim and Back* (Schocken, 1980).

Rubinstein gained prominence with a regular column in *Haaretz* and founded Israel's liberal-center party in August, 1987. He was also one of the founding fathers of *Dash* in 1977. Yet, he has no ax to grind. He is a Liberal, a Centrist, and a superb writer. His writing is imaginative and flowing, although some of his lively prose is lost in translation. This book is politically important, being an ideological interpretation of liberal, centrist, humanitarian or Weizmann-style Zionism.

Rubinstein, although born in Israel, is no *bizuist*, but rather, is an example of Israel's political activists, a man who, in Israeli parlance, belongs to "the sane Israelis." He is the son of a rich building contractor in Tel Aviv, a graduate of a Tel-Aviv Gymnasium and the former Dean of Tel-Aviv University Law School. He is a quintessential product of the urbanized, professional middle class of Tel Aviv, a liberal and Israeli equivalent of a yuppie. He could, without great difficulty, find a home in Peres' Labor Party,

but I suspect that his anti-collectivism and his upbringing make him a stranger to Labor. Yet his ideology, orientation and constituency are similar. His *Shinui*, now the Liberal Center Party, votes without fail with Peres on key international programs and ideas.

In this book, Rubinstein's thesis takes off with the Herzelian theme, that of the *Judennot*, i.e., the abnormality of the Jew as the chief motivation for Zionism and as a cure to the diaspora Jew. Rubinstein asks: Is Israel a normal state? Is the Israeli a normal Jew? Has Israel normalized the Jews of Israel, achieving the Herzelian Zionist dream.?

What happened to the Zionist dream, or rather, what went wrong with it? That is Rubinstein's concern. It is answered in new chapters added to the English translation that show the author's colors: "Lebanon and the Burden of Jewish History." Another title might have been "What do Normal Jews do in the Abnormal Middle East?" But that, of course, would surrender too soon the author's tendencies. Rubinstein raises numerous questions, one of which is: did Israelis establish a society characterized by tolerance and social justice? (p. 10).

To answer such imposing questions, Rubinstein travels in several spheres. The meaning of normalization — the theme of the book — begins with a clear and concise analysis of Herzl and of the Zionist Yishuv, and then moves into the Canaanite Movement, the Hebraic challenge to Jewish abnormality and the forerunners of Israel's militant and radical nationalists.

Canaanism was both a heresy and a fantasy. It was, however, a secular Zionist heresy. Yet it strongly influenced radical elements in Revisionism and was acknowledged as an important part of the ideology of *Lehi*. A Middle Eastern fantasy, it has become the

Utopia of *Hatehiyyah*, the party of the radical movement. Rubinstein analyses the Canaanites and their philosopher-poet, Yonatan Ratosh (Uriel Shelah), whose solution to the normalization of the Jews was to become a Hebrew. Absent from his book is an acknowledgement of the outstanding historian and analyst Professor Yaacov Shavit, who wrote *From Hebrew to Canaanite* (Jerusalem: The Domino Press, 1984, in Hebrew, and its English translation, Frank Cass, 1987), easily the best study of Zionist radical ideology and the utopianism of Hebrew Renaissance, as well as the ideological forerunners of the Gush Emunim, *Hatehiyyah* and the new and "normal" Israelis.

Next, Rubinstein tackles the radical messianic scions of the National Religious Party's youth movement, *B'nai Akiva*. The astonishing and overwhelming military victory of 1967 triggered the Utopian-Messianic religious radicals into action. There was a wide-spread political ideological response to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories gained in the 1967 victory. The huge military victory over three Arab armies, the tripling of the size of Israel, the now-forgotten enthusiasms and excitement engendered by these events, initiated a new *Lebensraum* movement. It also resurrected a new version of Sternism and Canaanism and other seemingly forgotten or marginal and anachronistic ideologies. Biblical fundamentalism, mixed with maximalist territorialism and overblown security doctrines, ignited a fundamentalism which incorporated ideas that negated the notion of the Wandering Jew, of the wandering peoples.

Zikah Arzit, the organic link to the land, was now tied in with redemption. Unlike the 1948 war, which was a war for independence, fought by a different generation of pragmatist Israelis and for which

there could be no religious or biblical parallel, the Six-Day War became a war of redemption. It was seen as an act of God, an act of *Ha-hashgahah Ha-elionah*, which called for the fulfillment of the natural laws of Zionist settlement in the whole land of Israel, or *Erez Israel Hashlemah*.

Redemption, to the fundamentalists, had arrived. The appearance of a Messiah, not in evidence, was not required (as it would have been by orthodoxy), since the redemptive deeds, the annexation and settlement of Complete Israel were now in motion. It became the duty of Zionist activists to fulfill the dream of action now. It was an act of God and history.

Rubinstein's superb chapter, "The New Religious Militancy," which was researched by the Hebrew University's Yehoshua Frankel, analyzes Rabbi Shlomo Levinger, the ideological head of the *Gush*, and Yeshivat Ha-Rav Kook, the intellectual and ideological fountainhead of the *Gush*. Rubinstein demonstrates the *Gush*'s defiance of Herzelian Zionism. "This Zionism," he quotes Rabbi Yehuda Amital, "does not solve the problem of the Jews by setting up a Jewish state but is an instrument in the hands of the Almighty which prepares the people of Israel for the redemption" (p. 105). "We have not settled here to look for peace and quiet," writes another *Gush* Rabbi, Meir Yehiel. Thus, the settlement movement, fortified by these ideological premises, challenges historical and classical Herzelian Zionism.

Impressed as he is with the dynamics of Fundamentalist Zionism, Rubinstein seriously neglects to analyze the role played by the Socialist Collectivists and Kibbutz annexationists. They are graduates of *Ahdut-Haavodah-Kibbutz Hameuhad* party and movement, some of whom joined the *Hatehiyyah* party

and the settlement movement. The founding fathers of the ideology of *Erez Israel Hashalemah* were the secularist agriculturalists of the Kibbutz and *moshav* movements. It was Yizhak Tabenkin, the founding father of the *Kibbutz Hameuhad*, not Begin or *B'nai Akiva*, that created the ideology, the organization and the movement of complete *Erez Israel*. Indeed, it is strange that such a perceptive author should miss a gigantic chapter in the evolution of Israel's militant movement. In fact, the latter are *ideal* secular Herzelian Territorialist Zionists. Rubinstein seriously fails to distinguish between the Zionist territorialists and the Zionist messianists and anti-Zionist Canaanites.

Thus, what happened to the Herzelian *Judennot* concept and its driving force, Zionism, was that it set out the normalize, or, better, "Europeanize" and "civilize" the Jews. Rubinstein, in his superb essay, "The End of the Sabra Myth," declares that the Zionist doctrine sought to assimilate the Israeli, that the poets and Sabra writers of Israel were continually dealing with the theme of the Diaspora rejection and that the Israeli assimilation was consummated by integration into the territory, into the nation, into IDF and Shin Bet. Many Sabra authors — Moshe Shamir, S. Yizhar, Yizhak Sadeh, Ben Tammuz — are, and were, ideologues of territorial expansion of Zionism, beyond the borders of the partitioned state.

Rubinstein has no clear answer to Herzl's normalization of the Jew via Zionism, unless it was fulfilled by the assimilated Israeli Jew, the Sabra or the nationalist radicals and the followers of Hebraism and Canaanism. Yes, "Jewish sovereignty has demolished the foundation of ghetto-inspired outlook." But the "new type of fundamentalist Judaism is nothing more than a caricature of an ancient, pluralist civilization" (p. 179). He is aware that a secular Jewish state has altered the equation between "observance and exclusiveness" (pp. 179-180), that the new "religious chauvinism . . . is absurd" (p. 180) and that "Israel will be measured and its future will depend on its will and ability to return to . . . old truths" (p. 184).

In the words of Dr. David Hartman, as quoted by Rubinstein, "Israel has healed anti-Semitism." "Israel stands before the world and announces publicly that peoplehood, nationhood and spirituality are intellectually bound with each other" (p. 183).

This stimulating book is replete with ideas and information. It is one of the best, most concise and well-written books by a Sabra from Tel-Aviv. Rubinstein is fair and open-minded when he deals with his political rivals and ideological foes. I strongly recommend it for both the student of Israel and for those who know little about Israel and Zionism.

Some Books Worth Noting

Biography

Friedman, Maurice. *Martin Buber's Life and Work*. 3 vols. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988. 478 + 416 + 512 pp. \$44.85 (paper).

Earlier in this decade, Maurice Friedman began putting out his important study, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*. The three volumes, which came out between 1981 and 1983, covered, in sequence, the early, middle and late years, a span of almost a century — from 1878 to 1965. The author speaks of Buber as “a genius with an inexhaustible store of creativity.” Much of that inexhaustible quality has transmitted itself to Friedman, whose scholarly evaluation and analysis of one of the Jewish “greats” of this century shows a lifetime of devotion to his subject. This major contribution to Buberiana is now available in paperback.

Contemporary Issues

Fein, Leonard. *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. xxi + 329 pp., \$19.95.

The title of this book would seem to imply the answer, “We’re lost,” and we should stop and take our bearings. Then, perhaps, we might be able to go into the future intelligently instead of haphazardly.

The assurances, the givens of Jewish life in the “good old days” are not with us any longer in this land of great and golden opportunities, and Jewish lives — both public and private — are full of contradictions and, in many cases, vacuums. In the fourteen essays included here, at least five of which deal with some aspect of the meaning of Jewish life, Leonard Fein thoughtfully confronts our problems and offers some suggestions that may lead us to say, “Here I am, and I know where I am.”

Fiction

Patai, Raphael. *Gates to the Old City. A Book of Jewish Legends*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988. li + 807 pp., \$40.00.

The forty-page index of this volume is proof that no topic was outside the ken of Jewish interest. The legends which are presented are culled from a multitude of sources — the Bible, Apocrypha, Talmud, Midrash, Hasidism and folktales from the long centuries between the last two categories. Read seriatim they form a narrative of Jewish history. Read at random — as they can be — they are an interesting anthology of Jewish views and attitudes.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988. 244 pp., \$17.95.

Those who delight in Singer's preoccupation with lusts and pervers-

sions (though he would not describe them thus) in this world, let alone their counterparts in the other world, with its magic and its demons, will find much to their taste here. In twenty new stories the author's talent plays endless permutations on what have become his almost-identifying themes. Time does not wither Singer's narrative skill or his vivid use of language. These days, though he continues to write in Yiddish, he is now translating much of his material himself.

Jewish-Christian Relations

Petuchowski, Jakob J., ed. *When Jews and Christians Meet*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988. xi + 190 pp., \$34.50.

Brooks, Roger, ed. *Unanswered Questions*. Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1988. x + 224 pp.

Ecumenism is more than a fashionable stance these days; it is a problem which seriously preoccupies many significant thinkers of both faiths and, though the implementation is slow and, sometimes, seems minute, Jewish-Christian relations have changed for the better. The more we talk to each other calmly and intelligently, the more we listen in the same way, the closer we come to understanding ourselves and others.

The eleven papers in the first-rate collection edited by Petuchowski have the interesting sub-heads of "Where are We Going?," "From Theory to Practice," "The Joint Study of Scripture" and "Who Speaks for Whom When Judaism and Christianity Meet?" They cover, obviously, both speculation and fact. The thinkers whose papers appear here add much clarification to the question of how the two religious faiths can relate to each other.

In the volume edited by Brooks, the focus is somewhat narrower. Here only matters of theology are discussed, primarily the changes that have come about as the result of the Second Vatican Council's proclamation, *Nostra Aetate*, in 1965. A valuable aspect of this volume is that it contains the proclamation, the "Guidelines and Suggestions for Jewish-Christian Relations," and the "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church." With these three Catholic statements as background, even a new-comer to the question of ecumenical dialogue can appreciate and understand the analytic papers, by both Jews and Christians, which discuss the history of *Nostra Aetate* and the future agenda for dialogue on what the editor calls the "Unanswered Questions" and the "Unquestioned Answers."

R.B.W.

JUDAISM

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